WOMAN'S INFLUENCE IN THE EAST

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

SIR LEPEL GRIFFIN, K.C.S.I.

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WOMAN'S INFLUENCE IN THE EAST:

AS SHOWN

IN THE NOBLE LIVES OF

PAST QUEENS AND PRINCESSES OF INDIA.

BY

JOHN J. POOL

(LATE OF CALCUTTA),

AUTHOR OF

A LIFE OF HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN-EMPRESS, FOR INDIAN READERS.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

SIR LEPEL GRIFFIN, K.C.S.I.

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LIST OF BOOKS

USED IN CONNECTION WITH THIS WORK, AND NOW GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGED.

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Griffith's 'Ramayana.' 5 vols., verse.
Griffith's 'Idylls from the Sanskrit.'
Growse's 'Ramayana.' Prose.
H. C. Dutt's 'Lotus Leaves.'
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INTRODUCTION.

This work is a sincere and worthy attempt to assign their fair share of historical interest to the women of India, who, in spite of all popular belief to the contrary, have held in the past, and do hold to-day, a great and often a dominating influence in the domestic and political life of the country.

A traveller in the East, whether in China, India, Persia or Arabia, who sees throughout his wanderings no women save those of the lowest classes who are compelled by the exigencies of labour to appear unveiled, might imagine that feminine influence counted for little in the higher ranks of Oriental society. This would be a mistake. The seclusion of women, with their separation from the outward interests and occupations of men, is, in India, an accident, due to conditions which are now passing away, and chiefly to the constant invasions by Mahommedan armies of the Northern Provinces of India, and the consequent anarchy which prevailed over the whole continent. In ancient days, as we see by the delightful comedies of Kalidása and the epic poems of the Ramáyana

and the Mahabhárata, Indian women enjoyed great comparative freedom. They were not married until they had reached womanhood; they were allowed generally a voice in the choice of a husband and always a veto on the selected suitor. They attended, with men, social and religious festivals, and received an equal share of the education of the day, which seems to have been superior in point of accomplishments to that which is provided to-day in the Government schools. When India fell from its high estate of civilization into comparative barbarism — in the same way as Europe fell from the high ideal of Greece and Rome to the degradation of the Dark Ages — women lost their equality with men, and became, as is the rule amongst barbarians, the prize of the strongest. Wars for the sake of a woman's fair face were quite as frequent in Indian as in European history.

In addition to this cause, the example of the Mahommedan conquerors of India, who secluded their women, had a great and lasting effect. The number of Mahommedans in India is very great, and in the Punjab amounts to exactly half the population; while, having been for so many generations the ruling race, whether their monarchs held their court at Delhi or at Kabul, the Mahommedan fashion was naturally followed by all those Hindus who desired to stand well with the rulers of the country, and at the same time to save their women from the too energetic admiration of their charms, which the Mahommedan conquerors were notorious for expressing. The harems of the most

powerful of the Delhi emperors were filled with ladies of Hindu families.

The seclusion of women as enjoined by the Prophet Mahommed, and the rules which he prescribed generally for the treatment of the sex, are ignorantly supposed to be degrading and obnoxious to high civilization; but if we consider the state of society at the time of Mahommed and the savage barbarism of the tribes of Arabia amongst whom he preached, it will be found that, although he was unable to abolish polygamy and probably had no wish to do so, yet that he did everything in his power to ameliorate the condition of women, both slave and free, that he gave the wife a higher status than she had ever before held; and it may be fairly asserted that the position of a married Mahommedan woman to-day is socially and legally more secure and protected against arbitrary violence, either to person or property, than that of an Englishwoman, whose disabilities until the last few years were a reproach to our civilization. Even now, in matters such as divorce, the Englishwoman occupies an ignominious position which it should be the object of all legislators, possessed of chivalry and good sense, to remove as speedily as possible.

In his interesting book, Mr. Pool has made an excellent and representative collection of Indian heroines. But there are many others who have filled a considerable space in the romance and history of the country who may well find a place in a future volume. There is the beautiful Rúpmati, whose romantic story is for

ever associated with the ruined city of Mándu, where her royal lover built for her a palace from the topmost windows of which she might see her beloved Nerbudda, a silver streak of water in the dim distance. The story of Ráni Sahib Kour of Pattiala has been told; but another princess of that house, Ráni Anskour, who ruled the State with great energy and ability from 1811 to 1823, is quite as well worthy of record. Equally remarkable was Ráni Rajindar, who defied the Mahrattas in the fulness of their power, and of whom I wrote in my biographies of the Punjab Rajas: 'Ráni Rajindar was one of the most remarkable women of her age. She possessed all the virtues which men pretend are their own—courage, perseverance and sagacity—without any mixture of the weaknesses which men attribute to women; and remembering her history, and that of Ránis Sahib Kour and Anskour, who some years later conducted with so much ability the affairs of the Pattiala State, it would almost appear that the Phulkian chiefs excluded by direct enactment all women from any share of power, from the suspicion that they were able to use it far more wisely than themselves.'

The women who have made the most mark in Indian history have been Sikhs, Mahrattas or Mahommedans; and the reason is probably found in the fact that among these races the marriage of girls is generally deferred to a reasonable age, while among the two former the seclusion of women is much less strict than among ordinary Hindu castes. Even among Mahommedans the rule is relaxed in the case of ruling princesses. The present

Begum of Bhopal, Shah Jahán, was, until her second marriage, always accustomed to attend durbar and perform public business and hear petitions in open court, unveiled; and while this practice prevailed, and she was easy of access to ministers and subjects, the State was well administered. It was only when she retired into the strict seclusion of the Zanána that the grave maladministration occurred which called for the interference of the British Government. Her mother, the Sikandar Begum, was a woman of great ability, courage and force of character, and ruled the State quite as skilfully as any man could have done.

The Indore State has produced at least one woman of conspicuous ability, Ráni Ahalya Bai, widow of Kunde Rao Holkar. She ruled Indore for no less than thirty years, from 1765 to 1795, and has left an enduring reputation for wisdom, purity and munificence. The time in which she lived was a stormy one, perhaps the most so in Indian history; but she steered the ship of the State successfully through all the breakers, and procured for her people a lengthened period of prosperity and peace.

Nor should the Ráni Durga Batti of Garrah be forgotten, who, to save the estates of her infant son from the rapacity of the Emperor Akbar, called her people to arms, and fought an unsuccessful battle with Asaf Khan, the imperial lieutenant. Scorning to fly, and preferring death to the loss of power and freedom, she killed herself on the field of battle.

By the place of these heroic women who have skil-

fully administered the States of debauched and imbecile husbands or infant sons, and who have fought in their defence at the head of their troops, some account should be given of other women whose lives have been as romantic and who have as powerfully affected the course of Indian history, but whose influence has been evil, and whose evil passions have brought about their ruin and that of their States. There are many such, of whom a conspicuous example is the Maharáni Jindan, who rose from the humblest origin to see her son, of nameless parentage, accepted as the Maharaja of the Punjab, and whose unbridled passions and the intrigues of her lovers largely helped to bring about the first Sikh war and the downfall of the monarchy which Ranjit Singh had so laboriously built up.

Whether the time will ever come when Indian women, or those of China and Persia and Turkey, will become emancipated in the Western sense, and enjoy the freedom of their English sisters, is more than doubtful; and in spite of some feeble efforts made by Parsis and Bengalis to draw their women into social intercourse with the outside world, the rule of the seclusion of women—once instituted as a protection—is continued as a mark of position and respectability; it becomes more strict each year, while its area enlarges and tends to include every caste or family which rises from a lower to a higher grade. Indian women do not desire to go beyond the privacy of the Zanána, and would consider publicity as a disgrace. It is foolish to judge the customs of other people by our own, or to suppose

that the society of London or Paris holds up an ideal which other races must attain or be considered uncivilized. The women of the East are not so much *en évidence* as those of Europe, but their influence within the legitimate circle of their domestic relations is quite as great, their manners are as good and their morality is as high. They do not try to do everything which men do, and conspicuously fail; they do not enjoy the delight of seeing their dresses and their looks recorded in the impertinent columns of society newspapers; they do not rush to the Divorce Court to listen to the unsavoury details of the latest fashionable scandal; and those who know most of the results of this freedom of women in the West, and the history of the richest and most luxurious society which the world has ever seen, may well doubt whether the Occidental or the Oriental method of treating the fair sex is more in accord with practical wisdom.

LEPEL GRIFFIN.

PREFACE.

WOMAN'S influence for good or for evil is admittedly great in all Western lands, and I think the perusal of the lives of past Queens and Princesses of India, as related in this volume, will show that woman in Eastern lands also, notwithstanding the fact that she is immured in a zenana, and is invisible to the eyes of the world, exerts a powerful influence, not only over her friends at home, but on society at large.

While in this work I illustrate 'Woman's Influence in the East' by glancing at the lives of those only who have moved in the higher walks of life, I shall probably seek in a future work to demonstrate the same truth from the annals of the poor.

Every year the interest of the people of the West deepens in all that concerns the women of India, so that I am not without hope that this book will be welcomed by many readers.

With the spread of education in the East, and the granting of greater freedom of thought and action to women, we may expect that woman's influence will be yet more strongly felt in the different grades and walks of Eastern life.

Four of the lives in this work are more or less mythological, but the rest are authentic history.

JOHN J. POOL.

REIMS, *January*, 1892.

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WOMAN'S INFLUENCE IN THE EAST.

I.

SITA, THE CONSORT OF RAMA.

MANY centuries ago—how many cannot be determined, but some think long before the birth of Christ—King Janaka ruled over the fair and fertile land of Mithila, in the north of India. And to Janaka was born a daughter, named Sita, whose eventful history we are now about to relate.

Nothing is known about the real mother of Sita, who doubtless died when her child was born, but the story which is generally accepted respecting the birth of our heroine is as follows. It is a strange but beautiful tale, and we give it as related by Sita herself on one occasion when questioned as to her pedigree:

'There is a King of Mithila,' she said, 'who loves his people as his own children. His life is very full of care, for on all occasions he feels with them and strives to think for them, as a righteous king should do. And this righteous King Janaka is my revered father.

'Some time back, as he was tracing with a plough the circle which encloses the ground where sacrifices are offered, a sudden ecstasy seized him. His heart, which had been mournful and depressed, glowed with new warmth, and into his mind, which anxiety had filled with clouds, came a rush of light. "O gentle spirit of the earth," he cried, "thou alone givest me comfort for humanity! Noble goddess of the soil, thou sayest to men, Comrade, put thy hand in mine, and let us work together; feed me, and I will give thee food; tend me, and I will guard and shelter thee; love me, and I will cast my beauty at thy feet; observe and study me, and I will teach thee to be strong and pure and brave."

'As he spoke, a dreamy haze stole over the sweet earth's face, like to the misty tenderness which veils a maiden's eyes when told she is beloved. Little by little, the amorous clouds merged into ethereal semblance of a woman's form. It floated into the embrace of his extended arms, and rested on his impassioned breast most lovingly a moment; then died back into the formless air, and left him, thrilled by that ineffable caress, enraptured, but very tremulous. "I have had a vision," he said presently, and sighed. "*Only* a vision!" he repeated, and half wept. But as he put his hands to the plough once more, lo! before him, in the gaping furrow, he saw the loose soil move; and at length, slowly and with difficulty pushing through the heavy earth, emerged before him, as he stood wonderstruck, a pretty babe, with large bewildered eyes, who rested its tiny dimpled hand upon the broken turf, and struggled hard, and

asked by plaintive cries to be released. I have heard my father say, that when he saw me thus, his heart cried out loudly, "This is my child," and a whisper from the deep bosom of the earth answered, "And mine." So Janaka ran forward and snatched me to his breast; then I wept no longer, but smiled happily and nestled there. And my father taught me ever to reverence the generous earth, my mother, and to strive to be as pure and true and brave as she. And he called me *Sita* (a furrow), because I sprang out of a furrow of the ground.'*

And Sita, whether a genuine child of Janaka, or whether found in the fields and adopted by him, was brought up under kind nurses in the palace at Mithila, and grew into a sweet girl and a beautiful maiden. Happy, very happy, were those days of youth, passed with a kind and indulgent father and loving and devoted attendants; and all too soon the decree went forth that the princess must think of marriage.

King Janaka, proud of the wonderful beauty of his daughter, and anxious to see her united to a brave and warlike prince, issued a proclamation that he would bestow her in marriage upon that hero who could bend a certain large and strong bow that had been in the possession of his family for many generations. Suitor after suitor arrived at the court of Mithila and essayed the task, but without success, and departed crestfallen and enraged, but only to return with combined forces to vent their wrath upon the city of Mithila. Janaka,

* Frederika Richardson's 'Iliad of the East.'

however, and his brave soldiers defeated the assailants and drove them back with great loss.

Many months passed by in these painful events, and Sita, the unwilling cause of war and bloodshed, was still unmarried, when one day there came to the court of the king two youthful strangers, the sons of a neighbouring monarch. Rama and Lakshman, for such were the names of the young heroes, requested, through their preceptor, a famous saint, who was with them, a sight of the bow which none so far had been able to bend, for they would try their luck.

'King Janak, at the saint's request,
This order to his train addressed :
"Let the great bow be hither borne,
Which flowery wreaths and scents adorn."
Soon as the monarch's words were said,
His servants to the city sped :
Five thousand youths in number, all
Of manly strength, and stature tall,
The ponderous light-wheeled chest that held
The heavenly bow, with toil propelled.
At length they brought that iron chest,
And thus the godlike king addressed :
"This best of bows, O lord, we bring,
Respected by each chief and king,
And place it for these youths to see
If, sovereign, such thy pleasure be."

'Then Rama at the word unclosed
The chest wherein its might reposed,
Thus crying, as he viewed it : "Lo !
I lay mine hand upon the bow :
May happy luck my hope attend
Its heavenly strength to lift or bend."

"Good luck be thine!" the hermit cried;
"Assay the task!" the king replied.
Then Raghu's son, as if in sport,
Before the thousands of the court,
The weapon by the middle raised,
That all the crowd in wonder gazed;
With steady arm the string he drew,
Till burst the mighty bow in two.'*

Thus Rama performed the wonderful deed which had been beyond the strength of many mighty princes and warriors to accomplish, and King Janaka, true to his royal word, betrothed him to Sita, the beautiful and the good, and arrangements were made as speedily as possible for the marriage. Couriers were sent off to acquaint King Raghu, or Dasaratha, of Ayodhya, with the success of his son, and at the same time urging that monarch and his suite to be present at the approaching nuptials. Promptly and gladly did Rama's father comply with the welcome request, and ere many days had elapsed arrived at Mithila with a great army and magnificent presents.

What an anxious and yet joyous time it was for Sita as she prepared for her marriage! She grieved at the thought of having to leave her father's palace, for all its associations were sweet and dear; and yet she could not but rejoice that she was about to be joined in wedlock with one who was youthful and wise, and tender and brave.

The eventful day at length arrived, and Rama, with his four brothers, who were to be married at the same

* Griffith's 'Ramayana.'

time to relatives of Sita, went to 'the ground for rites addressed.' There the bridegrooms waited till the brides arrived, just as is the custom now in Western nations. By command of the priests or saints, an altar was erected, on which fire was placed, and around the altar the marriage party gathered.

'Then by the hand King Janak drew
His Sita beautiful to view,
And placed her, bright in rich attire,
Rama to face, before the fire.
Thus speaking to the royal boy
Who filled Kansalya's heart with joy:
"Here Sita stands, my daughter fair,
The duties of thy life to share.
Take from her father, take thy bride;
Join hand in hand, and bliss betide!
A faithful wife, most blest is she,
And as thy shade will follow thee."
Thus as he spoke the monarch threw
O'er her young limbs the holy dew;
While gods and saints were heard to swell
The joyous cry, "'Tis well! 'Tis well!"'

The marriage over, Sita and the other young brides had to say 'good-bye' to Mithila and to all the friends of their youth, and were taken away to begin a new life in Ayodhya, over which good King Dasaratha reigned. And now is the time to speak more particularly of the family into which Sita had married, and of the young prince her husband.

King Dasaratha had three queens and seven hundred and fifty concubines, but for a long time he had no children. At length, however, four sons were born, and

great was the rejoicing of the royal household. Rama, who married Sita, was the eldest, and from all accounts the wisest, strongest and most worthy. Perhaps it would be well to mention, once for all, that the Hindus generally believe that Rama and his brothers were incarnations of the god Vishnu. Rama partook of half the nature of Vishnu, Bharata of a quarter, and Lakshman and Satrughua each of an eighth. It will thus be seen that Sita had become the consort of no common hero, and his virtues are eloquently described in the Ramayan:

'Rama was beautiful and strong,
From envy free, the foe of wrong,
With all his father's virtues blest,
And peerless in the world confessed.
With placid soul he softly spoke :
No harsh reply could taunts provoke.
He ever loved the good and sage
Revered for virtue and for age,
And when his martial tasks were o'er
Sat listening to their peaceful lore ;
Wise, modest, pure, he honoured eld,
His lips from lying tales withheld ;
Due reverence to the Brahmans gave,
And ruled each passion like a slave ;
Most tender, prompt at duty's call,
Loved by all men, he loved them all.'

For a time all went happily and even merrily with Sita at Ayodhya, for her husband was thoughtful and kind, and her husband's friends did all they could to make her happy. When, however, the question of formally recognising an heir-apparent to the throne came up, as it did ere long, on account of the growing

feebleness of the king, palace intrigues began, and there was trouble. Kaikeyi, the second and favourite queen, the mother of Bharata, was roused to jealousy on behalf of her own son, by a spiteful female servant, and she intrigued to bring Rama into discredit. Rama, as the eldest son, and as the wisest and bravest, was generally regarded as the most likely one to take up the reins of government; but still Dasaratha, as an absolute monarch, had power to set him aside if he chose. Such a deed, however, was far from the king's thoughts, for he dearly loved his eldest born; but the intrigues of Kaikeyi at length prevailed, and in a weak moment he promised her any boon she might demand at his hands, even unto the half of his kingdom; and she exclaimed:

> 'Then forth to Dandak's forest drive
> Thy Rama for nine years and five,
> And let him dwell a hermit there,
> With deerskin coat and matted hair.
> Without a rival let *my* boy
> The empire of the land enjoy;
> And let mine eyes ere morning see
> Thy Rama to the forest flee.'

And the king was sorry; nevertheless, for his oath's sake, he felt constrained to comply. Better for his own happiness, and the happiness of his kingdom, and his children's happiness, had he regarded his rash promise as more rightly kept in the breach than in the observance! With great grief, however, he called Rama into his presence and told him all, and urged him to depart in peace. And Rama, seeing his father's trouble, did not oppose his will, but agreed to the terms of

banishment in hopes of preventing further strife and misery.

With a heavy heart the prince wended his way homeward, for Sita knew little or nothing of the palace intrigues, and was full of joy as the time drew near when she expected to see her husband and lord presented to assembled thousands as the heir-apparent. Rama, in an agony of grief, poured out his troubles in the ears of his sympathetic bride, and he found, what many a man has found since, that his wife was not one to upbraid him or give way to despair in the hour of disaster, but was rather a true friend and helpmeet. If banishment was inevitable, then, she exclaimed, would she share its trials with her lord. Rama protested that the dangers and the risks were very great, and more than a delicately-nurtured lady ought to brave; but the princess earnestly and lovingly sought to overcome his objections.

'I swear it by thy gracious love, by thy dear life I swear,
In heaven itself I would not dwell unless my lord were there;
For not on mother or on son, on father or on friend,
But on her own dear husband must the faithful wife depend.
Thou art my refuge and defence, my guide, my god art thou;
I swear that I will follow thee, and naught shall change my vow.
If thou art banished to the woods, thy wife has firmly sworn
To trample down, before thy feet, the bramble and the thorn;
For royal courts and palaces to me are not so sweet,
Nor heaven so pleasant, as the place where treads my husband's feet.'*

Yet Rama was loth to give his consent and expatiated on the discomforts and annoyances and even dangers of

* Griffith's 'Idylls from the Sanskrit.'

life in the woods when under sentence of banishment; but Sita had her answer ready:

'The woes that thou hast counted up, the toil, the care, the pain,
All these, my love, for love of thee, I look upon as gain.
At Indra's might I tremble not, when guarded by thine arm:
And can the rovers of the wood do happy Sita harm?
I will not dread the lion's roar, nor turn away to fly
From tigers bounding through the brake if thou art only nigh.
And death to me were sweeter far, with thine arms round me thrown,
Than life in thy father's palaces, in safety, but alone.
Now, hear my word, my lord and love: with thee must Sita go,
Or die, by thee deserted here, in grief and bitter woe.
With thee my spirit will be glad, and aught that I endure
While, pilgrim-like with thee I roam, will make me yet more pure.
And very blessed shall I be in this and the coming life;
For thou, my Rama, ever art a god unto thy wife.
The wife's eternal duty is, as holy priests declare,
To follow where her husband goes, his weal and woe to share;
And for the true and loving wife remains the endless bliss
Of sharing all this life with him and the life that follows this.'

Rama, won by such sweet words, acquiesced in Sita's wish to accompany him, and with his brother Lakshman, who also would not leave him, he set forth upon his travels, amid the lamentations of the whole city of Ayodhya. The wanderers passed through Sringavera, the modern Sungur, and Prayaga, the modern Allahabad, where they rested at a famous hermitage, and then came to Chitra-kutra, south of the Jumna, in Bandelkhand. From thence Rama sent back his charioteer to Ayodhya, and the people of the city seeing him return without their prince, again filled the air with lamentations.

King Dasaratha was also grieved to the heart, and took to his bed; and, distracted by his sorrow, while imploring forgiveness of the mother of Rama, he fell back and died in her arms.

Then was there mourning deep and loud for the dead king and the banished prince; and Bharata, the son of the queen who had caused all the trouble, and for whom she had caused it, refused to assume the sovereign authority, but declared his determination to bring back the exiled Rama. After the funeral rites of his father, Bharata did what was in his heart. He set off to find his brother; but when he arrived at Chitra-kutra Rama declined to assume the Raj until the term of his sentence of banishment had been completed. Bharata as firmly refused to ascend the throne, and finally it was arranged that he should return to Ayodhya in the character of Rama's vicegerent.

For ten long years Rama and Lakshman and the faithful Sita wandered about the country from hermitage to hermitage, receiving kindness at the hands of many, and doing good wherever they went. At the hermitage of the sage Atri, near the forest of Dandaka, a little episode occurred which should not be overlooked in the story of Sita's life. Atri had a wife, a very aged person, who is described as 'a miracle amongst saintly women.' When Sita entered the hermit's dwelling, she found this ancient lady seated on a couch of the sacred grass, kusa; 'her figure was bent and withered, her countenance wrinkled, her eyes dim, and she trembled always as the aspen does, when the rough north wind is abroad.

Nature had laid on her the supreme penance of age; which earns, too, the supreme compensation—rest.'

Advancing to the mistress of the house, Sita clasped her hands and raised them to her forehead as the laws of politeness required, and bowing herself before the illustrious saint, inquired courteously how she did. Then the venerable one, looking long and fixedly at the princess, at length remarked: 'Thou art beautiful, child, and that is not ill; thou art young and in good health, and that is better; thou art a dutiful and obedient wife, and that is best of all. I have heard of thee—how thou hast abandoned the luxuries of the court to follow thy husband's fortunes in the pathless woods. There are many would tell thou hadst performed a heroic action; but I am too old to use flatteries. I say merely thou hast done thy duty. A dutiful wife is the reflection of her husband; her mind is the mirror which repeats his thoughts; her actions shape them after the model of his; and she herself follows him, meekly and self-forgettingly, as the shadow which trails behind him in the dust.'

Then Sita gave the beautiful rejoinder: 'I cannot tell whether I be a dutiful wife or not; I only know that I love Rama. When I stood by the sacred fire, and the flame glowed up into my hero's face as he vowed to love and cherish me, his eyes met mine, and they held me, and I could not look away. Then my soul went out to him. I cannot tell if it was God did that, or the flame which lit up both our faces, or whether his dark, wistful eyes drew the heart out from me! I only know that when my gaze fell there was a heaviness in my breast,

and a pain, and yet a strange delight. And where there had been selfish pride before was written Rama; and where there had been hope or joy or beauty was written Rama; and where there had been dreams of unknown bliss was written Rama; and where there had been God and heaven was written Rama.'

When Sita had finished, the aged matron stroked her cheek and smiled, and the princess, half-ashamed of her loving confession, hid her glowing face in the old woman's bosom and lay there trembling. Then the venerable one said: 'Listen, my gentle singing bird. By virtue of my austere life, I have obtained many gifts from the generous immortals: one of them I have reserved for thee. Henceforth thou shalt walk adorned with celestial radiance, which shall add fresh lustre to thy surpassing beauty. The soft tints of thy raiment shall not fade, nor be ever soiled; and those flowers entwined in thy glossy hair shall never die nor lose their sweetness.' And receiving these gifts with all thankfulness, the bride of Rama flung her arms round the aged saint, and whispered: 'I shall be more beautiful in *his* sight.'

From Dandaka Sita and her husband and brother journeyed on to Ranetak, near Nagpur, and then on to Kunjara to the south of the Vindhya mountains, where they rested for a time under the hospitable roof of the sage Agastya. And now fresh misfortunes began to visit them in ever increasing intensity. In the neighbourhood of Kunjara there resided a number of aborigines, who are described as Rakshasas, or cannibals;

and, unfortunately, one of these, named Surpa-nakha, a sister of Ravana, the King of Lanka, or Ceylon, fell in love with Rama. And she pressed her suit without fear or shame, and sought to entice the young hero away from his beloved Sita, but all to no purpose. Failing in her object of winning the husband, she then sought to wreak her vengeance on the wife by destroying her beauty, but she was caught in the hut by Lakshman as she was preparing to commit the cruel deed. Lakshman, in his wrath, severely punished the jealous woman, who fled to her brother, away in the island of Lanka, and sought to stir him up to revenge her wrongs.

And this is how Surpa-nakha pleaded her cause:

'Were it not a fine thing, my brother with the dreadful scowl, to have the heart of this grand Rama here—thus between your finger and thumb, to toy with it and make it the contemptible plaything of your careless hours, while he went desolate through the three worlds, wearing his soul away in a vain search, famished with longing, shamed by unutterable doubts, tortured by the impotence of his wrath? You understand me? *Carry off this Sita!* Would you wipe off the stain from our race, would you avenge your sister, would you break Rama's spirit and strangle the laughter of Lakshman? Carry off this Sita! Nay, if pride and revenge and hate are naught, would you win a youthful bride more radiant than the goddess of beauty herself? Then carry off this beautiful Sita.' And these arguments of the jealous and wrathful woman prevailed, and the King of Lanka answered: 'It sufficeth; so be it, my sister.'

Not many days afterwards a wandering fakir stood at the door of the hut in which Sita sat all alone, for Rama and Lakshman were out chasing a deer in the forest. 'Enter and repose yourself, holy man,' said the princess; and she brought him water to wash his feet, and hastened to set before him what viands she had, and bade him freely satisfy his hunger. 'Who art thou, maiden with the faultless form?' asked the stranger presently in the midst of her little courteous speeches. 'Never have I beheld so wondrous a vision of beauty. Whoever art thou, lady? How camest thou hither? Know'st thou not that this wood is the home of savage beasts of prey? So bright a loveliness as thine should rather grace some monarch's court.' Troubled by his ardent gaze, the princess answered simply: 'I am the wife of Rama; they call me Sita. Obedient to his father's word, my lord dwells here in exile; I am happy here, for I love my lord, and know no fear when he is by. And you, O hermit with the bold, keen eyes, who are you? And, oh! wherefore are you come?'

Then the stranger sprang to his feet and cried, 'I am Ravana, the sovereign of the three worlds! I am here because I love thee, Sita!' And he seized the shrinking woman by the two hands and poured out a passionate tale of love and devotion. But Sita snatched her hands away, and, half dead with terror, sank to the ground, and lay there 'like a flower of the prairie which the hot wind has seared.' Then Ravana stooped down to her and whispered softly: 'Why tremblest thou so, pretty one? This forest is too dreary and too rough a home for

thee. There is a pleasant island—the fairest isle in all the rippled sea—it is called Lanka; I have a gorgeous palace there which shall be thine; thou shalt have raiment and jewels, and young maidens to wait on thee, and all that makes the heart of women glad. And there, amidst the joys I will surround thee with, thou shalt soon forget this Rama.'

At the sound of that loved name courage came back to the heart of Sita, and she rose once more and stood up fearlessly before the stranger king, and sought to wither him with her words of scorn:

'Me, me, the true and loving dame
Of Rama, prince of deathless fame—
Me would'st thou vainly woo and press?
A jackal woo a lioness!
Steal from the sun his glory! such
Thy hope Lord Rama's wife to touch.
Fool, wilt thou dare to rend away
The famished lion's bleeding prey,
Or from the threatening jaws to take
The fang of some envenomed snake?
What, would'st thou shake with puny hand
Mount Mandar, towering o'er the land,
Put poison to thy lips, and think
The deadly cup a harmless drink?
With pointed needle touch thine eye?
A razor to thy tongue apply?
Be round thy neck a millstone tied,
And swim the sea from side to side;
Or, raising both thy hands on high,
Pluck sun and moon from yonder sky;
Or let the kindled flame be pressed,
Wrapt in thy garment to thy breast;
More wild the thought that seeks to win
Rama's dear wife, who knows not sin!'

In her anger Sita seemed to Ravana but more beautiful, and he loved her for her spirit as well as her graces of person. 'No more,' he said—'no more; I will not hear thee!' and taking her up in his arms, he pressed her to his bosom, and carried her out of the hut and into the wood, and away and away to his country and home in the south.

What a sad return home it was to Rama and Lakshman! No Sita to meet them at the door; no Sita to whisper tender words of welcome, and to inquire, seriously or laughingly, after their success in the chase. The hut was quiet and empty. And Rama shouted far and wide the name of Sita, but there came back no answer save 'Sita! Sita!' Then the brothers sat down in sorrow to think, and they arrived at the conclusion that in this sad business the hand of Ravana, the brother of Supra-nakha, was plainly visible. And their hearts were filled with grief and with indignation, and they rose up with a fiery and fixed determination to win back their loved one or die.

Proceeding to the south of India, the princely brothers made friends with a powerful tribe of aborigines, who are grimly described as monkeys by Hindu historians, and, forming an alliance with those people, it was resolved to cross the sea and rescue Sita, if yet alive, from the hands of Ravana, the King of Lanka. But first Hanuman, the commander of the forces of Sugriva, the aboriginal chief, was sent to spy out the land, and to open communications, if possible, with the imprisoned princess. And this he boldly and skilfully accom-

plished, and if we follow him we shall see how it fared with Sita in her island captivity.

Hanuman found the gentle and sorrowful lady just outside the capital city of Lanka, by a little thicket of oleanders, through which a pleasant river ran. There she was seated on the grass, surrounded by a guard of women of the land, who had been especially charged by Ravana never to lose sight of her. 'Her black, silky hair streamed down to the ground, and lay heaped up in a gleaming mass beside her; her eyes were downcast; on their long lashes gleamed two brilliant tears that would not fall; her mouth—it was so small a mouth to be so sad!—trembled a little—that was the only movement; her arms stretched forth—her little hands clasped—were flung heedlessly to the side of her, and had fallen upon the glossy coils of hair. She seemed quite to have given up hope.'

Presently, as Hanuman watched the lady and her attendants, a noise of chariots and elephants was heard. It was the King of Lanka, escorted by a brilliant company, who came to visit his captive. Like some beautiful wild creature brought to bay, Sita sprang to her feet and confronted her captor with defiant eyes. Then Ravana addressed her in softened tones: 'Why dost thou gaze on me thus wildly, Sita? Have I been so harsh to thee? Child! child! am I thine enemy because the love of thee has so taken up my soul that life has no delight or warmth save in thy presence? The tears are heavy on thy lashes, O my queen! And yet joy beckons thee. My wealth and power and all the pleasant luxuries of

my court are thine ; stoop only to gather them, my fawn-eyed Sita !'

And the princess answered him by calling aloud the name of Rama. 'Oh, Rama ! Oh, my love !' she cried. 'This man with a thousand crimes upon his head, a thousand vices in his soul, who has torn me from thy dear arms and brought this anguish into both our lives, comes to me and says : "For all my guilt and vice, and for the wrong I have done thee, and because there is not so vile a creature in the empires of water, earth, and air, *therefore* love me, Sita ;" and oh, my lord, he stands there as though he doubted of my answer.' She finished with a little scornful laugh that died into a sob. And Ravana was stung to the quick by the loathing and the sarcasm of his captive, and scowled darkly upon her, and turned away with the words : 'I have sought to stir thy ambition—the quality is not thine ; to touch thy heart—thou hast closed it against me. There remains one other weapon—*fear !* I give thee one month to bend thee to my will ; thou shalt yield then ! I say thou shalt yield—if thou choose not rather to die.'

When the monarch's back was turned and the guards had withdrawn themselves a space and left Sita alone, then Hanuman spoke out of his hiding-place, and, bidding her not betray signs of his presence, declared that he had come as the humble friend of Rama to bear a message to his Sita, a message of love and of hope. 'But should we not take this opportunity to escape ?' exclaimed Hanuman. 'Come with me, and I will bear thee to thy Rama.' 'Nay, nay, good friend,' she

answered; 'if it were possible I would not do it—I will wait here for Rama. Were it not a shame to him that another should save his bride? Tell him that little Sita awaits him in captivity, and will owe her rescue to none other than her beloved.

'Be it as you will,' said Hanuman a little sadly. 'Only I pray thee give me some message to the noble Rama, that he may be assured that I have seen and talked with you.' Dropping her eyes bashfully, she answered: 'Once when our exile was young, and we dwelt on the Mount Chitra-kutra, I looked up into my hero's face with love. We were alone on the hill-side, seated beneath some flowering shrubs. In sport my Rama plucked a branch laden with many blossoms, and with their crimson sap traced a tilaka on my brow. So later I rested my head against his breast, and when I raised it, lo! a red tilaka was stained there too! And we laughed greatly at that, for our hearts were full of love—and when that is so, a small thing gives happiness. There was none near, only the still blue overhead, and round us the fluttering leaves. Tell Rama of the red tilaka, and he will know that you have seen his beloved.'

Away went Hanuman in hot haste, and, crossing the ocean, related to Rama all that he had seen and heard in the island of Lanka. And soon a mighty army was conveyed to the farther shores with Sugriva, Hanuman, Rama, and Lakshman at its head. And this army proceeded on its way to the capital, conquering all who opposed it, hastening to arrive before the end of the

month of grace which had been given by Ravana to Sita.

One day the evil-minded king, standing upon the ramparts of his castle, saw the avenging army approaching, though still far distant, and he felt that the hour of his death was nigh; but still he was bent on conquering and humbling the lovely Sita. Descending to his private room, he sent for his magician, and the two spent the night in consultation. Early the next morning they were to be seen hastening to a cavern where Sita was now hidden, and the king, entering alone, found his captive sitting with her large mournful eyes fixed on the walls of her prison with a hopeless stare which proved that her spirit was well-nigh crushed. Even when she saw Ravana, she only shuddered and turned her lovely face away; to reproach him now or to seek to escape from him seemed beyond her power. The king knelt down beside her on the cavern floor, and with a wild pathos in his voice whispered: 'Sita, the time has come for thee to yield. Must I have risked so much in vain? Nay, thou shalt listen to me! What did thy boy-love Rama to win thy childish heart? But I—have I not for thee provoked the enmity of all living things? For thee have I not fought and sinned and suffered? Ay, and do suffer now! Thou art mine, Sita—mine by right of guilt and sacrifice and loss.'

But when the monarch laid his hand upon her arm, Sita sprang to her feet and cried 'Rama, Rama, my dear lord, help!' but no answer came and no help. 'Look not to him,' said the king sternly; 'call on him no

more. Thy Rama is dead.' 'Dead!' shrieked the poor persecuted lady, 'dead!' And Ravana broke into a cruel laugh and said 'Yes, dead. He crossed the seas to murder me and to destroy Lanka, but ere he had time my warriors surrounded him and slew him. So, ho! Bring hither the head of Rama that was severed on the battle-field.' Then the magician rushed into the cavern and flung on the floor a head, soiled with blood and gashed with many wounds, but which yet bore a striking resemblance to the countenance of Rama. At the same time was thrown down a mighty bow which seemed the one Sita had seen so often through many years in the hands of her husband.

This awful sight was more than the overwrought nerves of the captive could bear, and with a wild shriek she fell to the earth rigid and cold. And Ravana could not arouse her, and he had to call in her women-guards and to leave her. Thus his last hope of winning Sita fled, and he went forth moodily to his fate. And one attendant more gentle than the rest tenderly lifted up the broken-hearted lady, and whispered comforting words in her ears as her senses slowly returned. 'Rama is not dead, my gentle one. Thy hero is not dead. It was a cruel trick of magic, meant to conquer thee by robbery of hope. Open thine eyes; be not afraid. See! see! the ugly thing has vanished; it was but a lying vision. Rama lives, and will rescue thee ere long.' And Sita was comforted.

For many days there was hard fighting around the walls of Lanka town, for Ravana was strong and brave,

and had many devoted followers; but one by one his chiefs were cut down and thousands of his troops destroyed, and at last the king himself fell, wounded to death by an arrow from the bow of Rama the avenger. With a crash like a mountain the giant fell, and the war was ended.

Surely now the sorrows of Sita are over, but no! there is one more trial, and this perhaps the hardest of all to bear, before the long-suffering princess passes back into the old happy life. Rama, when the victory over Ravana was won, with apparent fickleness seemed to cool down in his ardour to see his faithful Sita, and went not near her cave, but sent messengers to bring her to his presence. And when she arrived he looked coldly upon her, so coldly that Sita felt afraid and fell down at his feet and cried: 'Alas! I dreamed another greeting from my lord than this,' and she bathed his feet with her tears. But Rama, though pale and struggling hard against his feelings at seeing her thus, still put her from him. 'There is no beauty to be compared to thine in the three worlds!' he said. 'Wouldst thou have me think Ravana was dead to all these charms and kept thee prisoner merely out of hate to me. Nay, though thy heart be innocent, his love has tainted thee.' Poor Sita!

'Struck down with overwhelming shame,
She shrank within her trembling frame.
Each word of Rama's like a dart
Had pierced the lady to the heart;
And from her sweet eyes unrestrained
The torrent of her sorrows rained.

Her weeping eyes at length she dried,
And thus 'mid choking sobs replied :
" Canst thou, a high-born prince, dismiss
A high-born dame with speech like this ?
Such words befit the meanest hind,
Not princely birth and generous mind.
By all my virtuous life I swear
I am not what thy words declare.
If some are faithless, wilt thou find
No love and truth in womankind ?
Doubt others if thou wilt, but own
The truth which all my life has shown.

' " Is all forgotten—all ? my birth,
Named Janak's child, from fostering earth ?
That day of triumph when, a maid,
My trembling hand in thine I laid ?
My meek obedience to thy will,
My faithful love, through joy and ill,
That never failed at duty's call—
O king ! is all forgotten—all ?" '

Then with sad dignity Sita turned to Lakshman and said : ' In thine eyes I see pity and trust in me. Build me a funeral-pyre, brother ; since I am tainted in Rama's sight, it is time that I should die.' Indignantly Lakshman collected a vast pile of boughs and trunks of trees scattered about the field. ' When he sees his innocent Sita ascend the pyre, Rama's heart will relent,' he thought. But the prince relented not, and even when he saw the sacred fire spring up around his wife he gave no sign nor spoke one pitying word. And when Sugriva and Hanuman and others rushed forward to drag the faithful lady from the pyre, Rama with a gesture of command waved them back.

'Agni, god of purity and light!' prayed Sita amid the flames, 'if I am true and clean and bright of soul as thou, then prove my innocence to my husband and all this host.' A golden flame, smokeless and of clear radiance as the sun, swam round her. Then from the midst sprang Agni, the resplendent god, who, bearing the princess from the pyre, placed her in Rama's arms. Then was broken up the hero's forced restraint. 'I hold thee!' he cried, 'my own—my love!' and wept for joy. Sita, lying on his breast, asked: 'Yet thou didst doubt me, Rama?' He answered, 'Nay, or I had not trusted thee to the pure God of Fire! But it was needful there should be no speck on thy soul's whiteness: for thy own sake first, then for the sake of all these here—that they might learn that *where reverence is not there is no true love, and that loveliness of outward form cannot make vice more tolerable.*'

And what shall we more say? Rama and Sita, the years of their banishment being over, returned to their home and to the high position to which they were called, and as they had displayed patience in affliction, so did they show moderation in prosperity. And God blessed them and made them a blessing.

NOTE.—The foregoing is a compilation, with alterations and additions, from Frederika Richardson's 'Iliad of the East.'—J.J.P.

II.

THE PRINCESS DRAUPADI.

DRAUPADI was the younger of two children born to Draupada, King of Panchala, the modern Rohilkhand. Dhrishta-dyamna was the name of her brother, and the boy and girl were brought up carefully and tenderly at their father's court.

Draupadi is described as very beautiful, and we, perhaps, could not do better than quote from the Mahabharata on this point, so as to give an idea of the standpoint from which the people of India regard beauty. We read: 'Blest with great good fortune, she was exceedingly handsome. Her complexion was dark, her eyes were black and large as lotus-leaves, and her locks were blue and curly. Her nails were beautifully convex, and bright as burnished copper; her eyebrows were fair, and her bosom was deep. Her body emitted a fragrance as that of a blue lotus, perceivable from a distance of full two miles. Her beauty, indeed, was such that she had no equal on earth, and she resembled a veritable daughter of the celestials.'

As was to be expected, such a lovely maiden as

Draupadi was eagerly sought in marriage, and very early in her life—as is the custom in India—her father began to look round for a suitable partner for her. Such an important matter, however, was very difficult to settle, and it was finally decided that a great *swayamwara* should be held at which the young lady should select a husband for herself amongst her numerous suitors. The term *swayamwara* literally means 'own choice'; but as the fair maiden generally, if not invariably, chose the warrior who most distinguished himself in the athletic sports held on the occasion, it came at last to signify a tournament.

King Draupada, when the date of the *swayamwara* was fixed, caused a very stiff bow to be made which only a mighty man of valour would be able to bend, and 'erecting some machinery in the sky,' he set above it a mark,* and sent a proclamation far and wide to the effect: 'He who will string this bow and with these well-adorned arrows will shoot the mark above the machine shall obtain my daughter.'

And in response to this proclamation kings and princes from other lands and states flocked to Panchala, and were warmly received and hospitably entertained by the king. For their use was set aside a number of seven-storied palaces made of marble and beautifully furnished. 'The windows of these mansions were covered with network of gold, and the walls were set with diamonds and precious stones, and the staircases were easy of ascent, and the floors were covered with

* H. C. Dutt, Esq., takes the target to be a fish in a glass globe.

costly carpets and cloths. And each palace had a hundred doors wide enough to admit a crowd of persons.'

When the long-looked-for day for the grand tournament arrived, the kings, and princes, and Brahmins, and illustrious saints (some of whom were going to take part in the games of skill and strength, and others to be spectators), could be seen wending their way to the vast amphitheatre which had been erected on a level plain to the north-east of the capital. 'This amphitheatre was enclosed on all sides with high walls and a moat with arched doorways here and there, and it was shaded by a canopy of various colours. It resounded also with the notes of thousands of trumpets, and was scented with the black aloe and sprinkled all over with water mixed with sandal-paste, and was adorned with garlands of flowers.'

At the appointed hour the fair Draupadi arrived, richly attired and adorned with many a precious jewel, and bearing in her hand a golden dish; and amidst the plaudits of tens of thousands of spectators she took her seat on a throne that had been specially prepared for the occasion. And surpassing lovely did she look as she bowed her acknowledgments with a smile and a blush. And when all was still, her royal brother Dhrishta-dyamna arose, and advancing to Draupadi, took hold of her hand and announced with a voice 'loud and deep as that of the kettledrum': 'Hear, ye assembled kings and princes; this is the bow, that is the mark, and these are the arrows! Shoot the mark through

the orifice of the machine by means of these five sharpened arrows. Truly do I say that he who, possessed of lineage, beauty of person, and strength, achieveth this great feat, shall obtain to-day this my sister as his wife.' And having thus spoken Dhrishtadyamna sat down.

Thereupon, it is recorded, the assembled princes afflicted with the shafts of the god of the flowery bow, and with hearts utterly lost in the contemplation of Draupadi, descended into the amphitheatre, and assayed the herculean task.

'As one by one the princes try
The appointed feat of archery
To prove their skill, the crowds huzza,
And nearer in a circle draw.
But all their rising zest expires
At ill success—they flag, retire.
Each suitor with his head bent low,
Eyes resting on tbe vase below,
Of limpid water picturing bright
The target fish (which danced in light),
Must send through five concentric rings
An arrow quivering on its wings
Straight to its destined goal. But, lo!
Some even failed to bend the bow,
So hard the wood, so tough the string,
The archers to the ground they fling,
Thus bravely wrought by king's command
To try the noblest of the land.'*

At length the illustrious and determined Shishupata tried with might and main to bend the bow, with the only result of falling upon his knees on the ground.

* H. C. Dutt's 'Lotus-Leaves.'

King Jerasandha, endued with great strength and power, was also thrown, and rose up and left the amphitheatre and returned to his kingdom. And the great hero Salya, King of Madra, was also defeated, and became the object of derisive laughter; and thus it went on until many thousands of princes had tried their skill. 'Their strength spent, and their crowns and garlands loosened from their persons, they began to pant for breath, and their ambition of winning that fair maiden was cooled.'

But now a young man, attired as a Brahmin, appeared on the scene and asked permission to essay the task. Some of the warriors cried 'yes' and some cried 'no,' while Draupadi nodded her head pleasantly, for she liked the looks of the bold young fellow; and he, taking her nod and smile as approval, sprang forward:

> 'A moment, motionless, he stood and scanned
> The bow, collecting all his energy.
> Next, walking round in homage, breathed a prayer
> To the Supreme bestower of good gifts;
> Then, fixing all his mind on Draupadi,
> He grasped the ponderous weapon in his hand,
> And with one vigorous effort braced the string.
> Quickly the shafts were aimed; they flew—
> The mark fell pierced.'

Then was there a loud uproar in the amphitheatre, and thousands of spectators, especially the Brahmins, began to wave their upper garments with joy, and flowers were thrown upon the winner, and the musicians struck up a lively tune, and bands and heralds began to chant in sweet tones the praises of the hero of the day.

And Draupadi beholding her youthful and handsome suitor approaching her, trembled with joy, and blushed and smiled with pleasure, and gladly and lovingly put her hands in both of his, and allowed herself to be led away as his affianced bride.

And who was this young man dressed as a Brahmin who had performed such a wonderful feat? Men had suspicion that he was no Brahmin priest, but a famous and renowned prince who had come to Panchala in disguise; and so it turned out on inquiry. The youthful hero was Arjuna, one of five brothers, princes of the great house of Pandu, who were fugitives from the hatred of their cousin Duryadhana, who had supplanted them in the affections of King Dhrita-rashtra, of Hastinapore, and taken from them their possessions.

For some years these five princes with their mother had been wandering about the country in disguise, and on drawing near to Panchala had heard of the grand tournament, and of the beauty of Draupadi, and Arjuna had declared that he would try his skill and strength with the rest, and with what success we have seen.

When the princely rank of Arjuna and his brethren became known, King Draupada and his son gave them a hearty welcome to the city, and arrangements were proceeded with for the celebration of the nuptials of the happy couple. But now a difficulty arose. When Arjuna's brothers saw the charming bride, they all fell in love with her, and all wished to have her for wife, and there seemed likely to be a quarrel amongst them, which, however, was amicably settled at length by their

mother, who actually proposed the extraordinary plan of Draupadi becoming their common spouse. Now, polygamy was common enough in the land, but polyandry seems to have been a rare thing at that time, so there was a great discussion on this matter before a final decision was come to. The king had to be consulted, and Brahmins and great Rishis had to be interviewed and their opinions taken, so that the right thing might be done.

But when princes are determined to carry a matter through, sound reasons can, as a rule, be found for any course they are resolved to take, as witness the case of King Henry VIII. of England. We find, therefore, that the eldest brother Yudheshthira had an audience with the bride's father, who began the conversation by saying, 'Oh, scion of the Kuru race, it hath been directed that one man may have many wives, but it hath never been heard that one woman may have many husbands. Is this thing that is proposed right?' Then Yudheshthira mentioned two similar cases that he had heard of—one a lady named Jatila, who married four saints, and another, a saint's daughter, who married ten brothers bearing the name of Pracheta.

A learned and respectable ascetic was also called in—the great Vyasa—to support the princes in their suit, and he told the following wonderful story: The lovely Draupadi, he said, in her former birth was the daughter of an illustrious saint, but though a very handsome maiden, she somehow did not obtain a husband. Grieving sorely about this, she prayed and sacrificed to

Mahadeva, the great god, who at length appeared before her. 'Ask thou the boon thou desirest, fair maid,' he exclaimed. Thereupon she said again and again, 'I desire to obtain in my next birth a husband possessed of every accomplishment. 'Thou shalt have *five* husbands,' said Mahadeva. 'But I don't want *five* husbands,' answered the maiden. The god, smiling, replied: 'Amiable one, thou addressed me full five times repeating, *Give me a husband*, therefore it shall be even as thou hast asked: blessed be thou.'

After Vyasa had told this far-fetched story, which, however, devout Hindus who believe in 'many births' do not count strange, the matter was considered as satisfactorily settled by all, and a day was fixed for the marriage of Draupadi to the five stalwart brothers. When the marriage day arrived there came to witness the wedding all the friends and relatives of King Draupada, his ministers of state, and many Brahmins and citizens. 'The king's palace, adorned with that concourse of people, with its yard decked with lotuses and lilies scattered thereon, and beautified with lines of troops and festooned around with diamonds and precious stones, looked like a firmament studded with brilliant stars.

'Then the five princes, endued with youth and adorned with ear-rings, attired in costly robes and perfumed with sandal-paste, having bathed and performed the usual rites of religion, entered the wedding hall one after another in due order and with glad hearts.' The high priest, Dhauneya, having ignited the sacred fire

and repeated certain prayers, poured clarified butter into the blazing element, and then called Yudheshthira, the eldest brother, to step forward. Thereupon he joined the hands of the bride and bridegroom, who walked round the sacred fire, and thus became man and wife. Draupadi had to go through the same ceremony with all the brothers, and at the close of the service left her father's house, poor girl! 'very much married.'

The five princes, with their wife and mother, now settled at Panchala for the time being. King Draupada gave them a magnificent palace to live in, and treated them very generously in many other ways. For instance, he made them a present of one hundred chariots with golden flag-staffs, each drawn by four horses with golden bridles; also one hundred elephants, also a hundred female servants decked in costly robes and ornaments. And, finally, the good king handed over to the princes a lakh of coins.

As time went on the brothers increased in power, and at length they felt themselves strong enough to negotiate with the usurper, their cousin Duryadhana, for a restoration of their possessions. After much trouble, matters were finally arranged so that the wanderers might return to their own land, and the kingdom was to be divided between the two parties in the state. What a joyous return it was! The whole of the citizens of Hastinapore turned out to welcome the returning exiles, and for many a day there was great feasting and rejoicing.

And how fared it with the gentle Draupadi? From

all accounts, very well indeed. Her mother-in-law was kind to her, and her five husbands simply adored her, and vied with each other in giving her all that heart could wish. Never a cross word passed between the brothers on account of their wife, for though she loved Arjuna, who had won her at the tournament, best, yet she loved the others dearly, and sought to make them all happy.

What her husbands thought of her is manifest from a speech which Yudheshthira, the eldest, made once, and it shows also how the lady spent her time at home. 'Our wife,' he said, 'is of slender waist and has long flowing hair. She retires to bed last and gets up first, and she looketh well after all, down to the cowherds and the shepherds. She is possessed of every accomplishment, and is compassionate and sweet-speeched. Having eyes like the lotus-leaves, and being equal in beauty unto Laksmi, and equal to Sree herself in symmetry and grace, she is such a woman as a man may desire for wife in respect of gentleness of heart and wealth of beauty and virtues.'

A few years were passed very happily by the princes in their own country, and Draupadi became the proud mother of four boys, who filled the palace with laughter, and gave promise to their parents, at any rate, of growing up into fine, strong, brave lads.

But after a time the old envies and jealousies between the cousins, which had, in fact, only been slumbering, broke out afresh. Duryadhana and his brethren sought every opportunity of annoying Yudheshthira and his

brethren, and life became very uncomfortable and almost unbearable for all concerned. And the aged king could do little or nothing to allay the bitter animosities of the two parties, and it was with the utmost difficulty a semblance of peace could be kept between them. So it went on, until in an evil moment Yudheshthira gave his opponents a decided advantage, of which they eagerly availed themselves to work his and his family's ruin.

Yudheshthira and, in fact, all the princes were inveterate gamblers, and it was arranged by the cunning Duryadhana that there should be a trial of skill between the two parties. So a gambling hall was fitted up, full two miles in length and breadth, furnished with a hundred columns decked with gold and precious stones, and having a hundred gates of ingress and egress. At the long table which was placed in this hall the players sat and began to throw the dice. Yudheshthira was a skilled player, but his antagonist was an unprincipled character and used loaded dice, so that, notwithstanding the skill of the former, he began to lose. Immense sums of money were staked and lost, then followed his palaces, then his furniture, then his servants, then his brothers, then himself, and all were won by the rascal Duryadhana, and he managed the matter so well that no one thought he was cheating, but ascribed his success to good fortune, to good luck.

And now came a suggestion which startled the most hardened amongst them, and caused a shudder of horror to pass through the assembly. It was whispered to

Yudheshthira: 'Stake your wife Draupadi, for she is all you have left, and perhaps your luck will change, and you will regain all you have lost.' And the weak-minded prince, carried away with passion and with the hope of winning back his possessions, yielded to the tempter, and Draupadi was staked and lost. And then, when it was too late, Yudheshthira saw how madly and sinfully he had acted, and was beside himself with grief, and so also were his brothers, who had been painful witnesses of the sad and shameful deed.

But as for Duryadhana and his brethren, they were wild with delight, and ran about the hall shouting: 'We have won the beautiful Draupadi — the gentle, the graceful Draupadi.' Soon the order was given, 'Bring hither the wife of our cousins and let her sweep the room before us, and then let us send her to live with our serving-women.' But when the messenger reached the apartments of the princess, he was met with such dignity, and answered so calmly, that he returned to the assembly, saying that 'Draupadi could not believe that such folly had been committed in Hastinapore, and therefore refused to come.' Another messenger was sent, but with a similar result, and at length the command was given to bring her by force.

Then was seen what had never before been witnessed, even in the most lawless days of the kingdom: a princess of the royal house, and a king's daughter, was dragged with violence before an assembly of princes and courtiers to be mocked and humiliated. Not for a moment however, did Draupadi lose her presence of mind, and

when she was released from the grasp of the ruffians who had dragged her in, she stood up proud and beautiful, and cast around looks of anger and of scorn that cut men to the heart. But her enemies were remorseless, and proceeded to cry aloud, 'Slave!' 'Slave!' and otherwise to distress and grieve and humiliate her; but so patiently and bravely did she face all the contumely that was showered upon her, that the more noble in the assembly were thoroughly ashamed of the proceedings, and sought to put a stop to them.

The wicked Duryadhana insisted, however, upon his right to go on with the sport, for had he not won the fair Draupadi before them all in a game of chance? She was his lawful slave, and no one could pluck her out of his hands. But relief came happily at the eleventh hour, and from an unexpected quarter. The aged King Dhrita-rashtra was made acquainted with the turn events had taken, and when he heard of the way in which Draupadi was being treated, he hurried to the gambling hall and called the princes to account for their shameful deed. And showing true kingliness for once, he exerted his authority and released the persecuted lady, and promised her also any boon she liked to ask. And the noble Draupadi interceded on behalf of her husbands, and obtained their liberty and the restoration of their possessions.

After such a bitter experience as a consequence of gambling, it might have been expected that Yudheshthira and his brothers would have foresworn the pernicious

practice; but, alas! before very long we find them indulging in the same vice. They had been truly sorry and repentant with regard to the staking of their faithful wife, and when they received her forgiveness they vowed that never again would they play for such a prize, but short of that they were ready to stake anything and everything they had. And Duryadhana soon gave them the opportunity, the stake this time to be the whole kingdom for one party and banishment for the other.

And again, as was to be expected, Yudheshthira lost, and the brothers prepared themselves for departure into the desert as aforetime. It was with sad hearts, however, they broke the news of their defeat to their wife, for they knew that she would insist upon sharing their lot. And so it proved to be, for Draupadi, with what cheerfulness she could muster, said that whither they went she would go, and what they suffered she would suffer, as became a loving and obedient wife. The parting with Kunti, her mother-in-law, was very touching, for the aged lady was greatly afflicted at the fresh disasters which had overtaken her children; yet she sought to cheer and comfort Draupadi at the last moment with kind and generous words of farewell. 'Farewell, my love,' she said—'farewell; and grieve not unduly at this great calamity that hath overtaken thee. Thou art familiar with the duties of the female sex, and thy behaviour and conduct also have ever been what they should be. Thou art chaste and accomplished, and thy qualities have adorned the race of thy birth,

as also the race into which thou hast been admitted by marriage. Fortunate are my sons to have such a wife. O child, safely go thou blest by my prayers, and despair not: good women never suffer their hearts to be unstrung at what is inevitable.'

Some may think it strange that the Pandava princes, warlike and brave as they were, and having so many friends, should have quietly submitted to the terms of banishment. Their submission sprang from their truthfulness. They felt as men of honour that they ought to pay even their gambling debts, and though their hearts were hot with anger, they never for one moment shrank from their doom, or, as they spoke of it, their *fate*. The exact terms of the agreement were that the losers in the game of chance should go into exile for twelve years in the jungle, and thereafter live concealed for one more year in a city. And those conditions the princes were prepared to fulfil to the letter.

The early years of their exile were felt very keenly by Draupadi, for she had been delicately reared all her life, and besides the hardships of the way, she was much distressed at what she considered to be the injustice of their lot. 'Beholding superior and well-behaved and modest persons persecuted, while the sinful were happy, she was sorely troubled.' But as she thought over the matter light came in upon her soul, and she felt that the gods had some good object in view in thus permitting their worshippers to suffer. The thoughts of her mind, and the words in which she expressed them, are remarkable, and speak of high culture and deep

religious feeling. In conversation with her husbands on one occasion she spoke as follows:

'My beloved ones, it seems to me that God behaveth towards His creatures like a father or mother. The supreme Lord ordaineth everything in respect of the weal and woe, the happiness and misery, of all His creatures even prior to their birth. As a wooden doll is made to move its limbs by the wirepuller, so are creatures made to work by the Lord of all. Like space that covereth every object, God pervadeth every creature, ordaining its weal or woe. Like a bird tied with a string, every creature is dependent on God. Everyone is subject to God, and none else. No one can be his own ordainer. Like a pearl on its string or a bull held fast by the cord passing through its nose, or a tree fallen from the bank into the middle of the stream, every creature followeth the command of the Creator, because imbued with His spirit, and because established in Him. Men go to heaven or hell urged by God Himself.'

Then changing the conversation, the wise and learned lady sought to stir her husbands up to action, if not at once certainly at the end of their term of banishment. Though God worketh in man, she said, man must also work out his own salvation. To quote her own words: 'This is the conclusion of the whole matter—the person that does not act, certainly succumbeth. O my husbands, men of action in this world generally meet with success. The idle, however, never achieve success. The person that is idle and lieth at his length is overcome by adversity, while he that is active and skilful

is sure to enjoy prosperity. The tiller tilleth with the plough the soil, and soweth the seeds thereon. He then sitteth silent, for the clouds after that are the cause that will help the seeds to grow into plants. But if the clouds favour him not, then is he acquitted of blame, for he hath done what he could. Let us, my beloved ones, do what we can to win back what we have lost.'

But many hardships had to be endured, many dangers to be met, and many difficulties to be overcome, before the hour arrived for making an effort to recover their lost possessions. The words of the princess cheered the princes, however, and they were able to bear their sufferings with greater patience, and they looked forward with hopefulness to the future.

Towards the end of the twelve years of exile in the desert an incident happened which is deserving of particular attention. Draupadi, who seemed to grow more beautiful every day, was seen by a powerful chief of a district through which the exiles wandered, who fell desperately in love with her, and at an unguarded moment he succeeded in bearing her off from her husbands. Directly their great loss was discovered the princes hastened after the chief to rescue their wife, and a severe battle occurred between the parties, resulting, however, in the defeat of the chief and his people. Draupadi was rescued and carried off with great joy by Yudheshthira to a place of safety, while the other brothers sought to capture the defeated chief, who had escaped from the field of battle. Long and wearisome

was the chase, but at length the fugitive was caught, and his life was spared on condition that in public assemblies and in open courts he would always declare, 'I am the slave of the Pandavas.' After swearing to this, he was secured with chains and thrust into a chariot by Arjuna and the others, who drove off with him to the hermitage, where Yudheshthira and Draupadi were resting and waiting their arrival.

When Draupadi saw the captive chief who had sought to do her harm thus humbled in the dust, all her anger passed away, and she pitied him from her heart, and pleaded with her husbands to let him go free. And the noble Yudheshthira was of the same mind. Thereupon their enemy was told to stand up, the chains were taken off his limbs, and the following gracious words were addressed to him: 'O chief, thou art a free man. We emancipate thee. And yet we would say, shame to thee. Thou hadst intended to take away a lady by violence, the wife of others. Was it not a shameful deed? But we forgive thee, and say, depart in peace, and for the future cleave to virtue.' Thus addressed, the chief, overpowered with shame, bent down his head, and accepting his pardon, silently and sorrowfully went his way.

The twelve years of desert wandering came to an end, so also did the one extra year which had to be spent in seclusion in some city, and then the princes exclaimed: 'We are free from our oath and our vow, and we will now claim our own from the hands of our cousin Duryadhana.' But it was one thing to claim their estates and another thing to get them. Negotiations

were carried on unceasingly between the two parties, and the exiles were asked to return without insisting on any pledge to receive back their half of the kingdom. But they were not to be put off with mere offers of amity and protection, and in the end they sent the message that they would be satisfied with nothing less than the restitution of all their property and possessions.

Duryadhana, stubborn as a mule, refused to give up anything, and so there was nothing for it but to have the matter settled by war. Both parties called together their friends and allies, and made preparations for a prolonged struggle. Certain rules were agreed to on both sides for mitigating the horrors of the coming battle, and these it is interesting to notice. 'There was to be no stratagem or treachery, but fair stand-up fighting; there was to be a perfect truce between the combats; fugitives, suppliants, drummers, and chariot-drivers were to be treated as non-combatants; no combat was to take place without warning, or between unequals; no third warrior was to intervene between two combatants; and no fighting was to take place during the preliminary abusive challenges.'

The terrible war which followed was fought out on 'the field of the Kurus,' the plain between the Sarsawati and Jumna, where are Taneshawr and Paniput, a place where many important battles have been fought in the history of India; but it is not our intention to dwell upon the fratricidal struggle. It ended in the total defeat of the Kanravas, who had refused to grant justice to their exiled cousins. The five princes and their wife Draupadi

then hastened to Hastinapore, where they had a most affecting interview with the aged King Dhrita-rashtra.

So far, all promised well for the conquerors, and the gentle Draupadi hoped their sorrows were now over, but, alas! a terrible calamity befell them in the very hour of victory. Draupadi's sons, who had grown into brave and excellent young men, had been left behind in camp, and one of their enemies, stealing upon them in the darkness of the night, had slain them all, and had carried off their heads that the sight of them might gratify Duryadhana, who was dying on the field of battle. But it is cheering to notice that what was good in the wretched and guilty Duryadhana came to the surface in his dying hours. He bitterly reproached the man who had slain the harmless youths, and exclaimed with his last breath: 'My enmity was against the fathers, not against these dear innocents.'

Who can picture the grief of poor Draupadi when the news was carried to her of the awful end of her offspring! She was like Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted because they were not. And neither time nor prosperity seemed to assuage her grief. All the trials, sufferings and struggles of the past were as nothing to this sad loss that had come upon her. It was in vain her husbands spoke comforting words—her heart was broken, and she longed for that place 'where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest.'

Nor were the princes her husbands happy, though they had now obtained what they had desired for years,

and what had cost them so much strife and bloodshed. For a period of time they ruled wisely and justly at Hastinapore, but at length, tired of existence, they decided that they would hand over their kingdom to others, and go forth once more into the wilderness, this time to find and enter 'the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.' Yudheshthira, the eldest, took off, we are told, 'all his jewels and royal raiment, and clothed himself in vestment made of the bark of trees; and he and his four brothers threw the fire of their domestic cookery and sacrifices into the Ganges and went forth with Draupadi their wife from the city of Hastinapore, followed only by their dog.'

They left amid the lamentations of their people, who accompanied them as far as they might, though, as the story touchingly records, none of them could find it in their hearts to say 'Return.'

> 'And so set forth, 'midst wailing of all folk,
> And tears of women, weeping most to see
> The Princess Draupadi—that lovely prize
> Of the great gaming—Draupadi the Bright—
> Journeying afoot: but she and all the five
> Rejoiced, because their way lay heavenwards.'

It would appear that the wanderers thought that they could enter heaven in the flesh, and truly, according to the story, Yudheshthira did so enter, but all the others paid the debt of nature.

First to leave them on the heavenward march was the fearless Draupadi. In grief and astonishment Bhima asked his eldest brother the cause:

'Why doth she fail? For never all her life
Wrought our sweet lady one thing wrong, I think.
Thou knowest, make us know, why hath she failed?
Then Yudheshthira answered, Yea, one thing;
She loved our brother* better than all else—
Better than heaven: that was her tender sin,
Fault of a faultless soul: she pays for that.'

In turn each of the brothers fell, until the King Yudheshthira was left to proceed alone. Many an affectionate and regretful glance he was tempted to cast behind, but he steadfastly resisted, and set his face heavenwards. And his faithfulness was rewarded by the appearance of the god Indra, who appeared in a chariot of fire and invited the monarch to ascend. But now Yudheshthira looked back upon his fallen loved ones, and

'. . . . . answered, sore at heart
For those his kinsfolk fallen in the way:
"O thousand-eyed, O Lord of all the gods,
Give that my brothers come with me, who fell!
Not without them is heaven sweet to me.
She, too, the dear and kind, and queenly—she
Whose perfect virtue Paradise must crown—
Grant her to come with us! Dost thou grant this?"'

He is assured that the spirits of his brothers and Draupadi are already in heaven, and that there he will see them, but to him the higher honour is accorded of ascending living and in bodily form.

When the great king arrived, however, in the abodes of bliss he saw immortal gods and saints and heroes, and even his late enemies on earth, but nowhere could he find his faithful wife and devoted brothers, and he was not happy.

* Arjuna.

'. . . . . I do desire, he said,
That region, be it of the blest as this,
Or of the sorrowful, some otherwhere,
Where my dear brothers are and Draupadi;
I cannot stay elsewhere! I see them not.'

And when told that he ought not to question the wisdom and justice of the gods, but ought to be happy, though alone, in the immortal delights of heaven, he answered vehemently:

'. . . . . King of gods
. . . . . but I will not live
A little space without those souls I loved.
O slayer of the demons! let me go
Where Bhima and my brothers are, and she,
My Draupadi, the princess with the face
Softer and darker than the khilat-bud,
And soul as sweet as are its odours. Lo!
Where they have gone, there will I surely go.'

And the loving and brave man was put to the test. Down into the nethermost regions he was carried and shown the horrors of hell, and there he elected to remain if his loved ones were in that spot. It is a strange, weird story, related in the Mahabharata at great length with many beautiful and many repulsive details, and at last it closes with the statement that all was illusion through which the king had gone, and that he would find his brothers and the beautiful Draupadi in heaven. With eager steps he turned back, and entering once more that bright abode, he was welcomed with outstretched arms by that dear one who had been his true and faithful wife on earth.

And Draupadi, with her husbands around her and her children, was happy in the land of the blest.

III.

THE PRINCESS OF CANOUJE.

Towards the end of the twelfth century there lived in the city of Canouje a princess named Sunjogta, whose beauty led to the downfall of the native dynasties of India and to the subjugation of the country by the arms of the Mussulmans. The narrative of these events forms one of the most charming romances of Indian history, and brings to our notice deeds of heroism as stirring as any found in the history of our own land.

At the period we refer to, Hindustan was divided into the four kingdoms of Canouje, Delhi, Mewar, and Guzerat. And of these the two former were the most powerful. The kingdom of Delhi was ruled over by the renowned Pithowra, the gallant chief of the Chohans, the Cid of India, around whose banner gathered the bravest and the noblest of the Rajpoots. But strong as the kingdom of Delhi was, it is supposed that the kingdom of Canouje was still stronger, and of this kingdom Jeichand was the absolute monarch. Possessed of an army of 80,000 men in armour, 30,000 horse with quilted mail, 300,000 infantry, 200,000 bowmen

and axemen, besides 'a cloud of elephant-bearing warriors,' Jeichand might be said to be one of the greatest of the kings of the earth.

And to this monarch was born the Princess Sunjogta, known commonly as the Princess of Canouje, and reputed beautiful and clever. The native bards speak of her as 'the idol of her father, and the beloved of the whole nation.'

Under any circumstances the life of such a princess must have been eventful; but owing to a certain remarkable action of Jeichand's, Sunjogta was placed in a position, and had to take part in events, which have made her famous for all time. Jeichand, it appears, was so elated with his many victories over his enemies, and so proud of his position as monarch of Canouje, that he resolved to have divine honours paid to him in the rite that is called *Soenair*. 'This distinction,' says Tod in his 'Annals of Marwar,' 'which involves the most august ceremony, and is held as a virtual assumption of universal supremacy, had in all ages been attended with disaster. In the rite of *Soenair*, every office, down to the scullion of the banquet-hall, must be performed by royal personages; nor had it been attempted by any of the dynasties which ruled India since the Pandu: not even Vicrana, though he introduced his own era, had the audacity to attempt what Jeichand determined to execute.'

All India was in a state of wild excitement at the accounts of the magnificence of the preparations, and circular invitations were despatched to every prince

inviting him to assist at the pompous ceremony, which was to conclude with the nuptials of the rajah's only daughter, the fair Sunjogta. When the day for the *Soenair* drew near, kings and princes and great chiefs journeyed to Canouje from all parts of India, some willingly and gladly, but others with vexation and rage, for they resented the assumption of universal sovereignty which Jeichand was making. The only two princes, however, who ventured openly and boldly to question the right of Jeichand to perform the *Soenair* were Pithowra, of Delhi, already referred to, and his friend Samarsi, of Cheetore. These monarchs refused point-blank to be present at the sacred rite which was contemplated, and declared themselves to be in no way inferior to Jeichand himself.

When the contumacy of Pithowra and his friend became known at the court of Canouje, Jeichand was beside himself with passion, and declared that he would march at once on Delhi and compel Pithowra at the sword's point to be present at the great coronation. Besides the vexation of being scorned, the sore point was that, according to Hindu law, the presence of Pithowra and Samarsi was absolutely necessary to the proper observance of the ceremony of supreme inauguration. It seemed almost, under these circumstances, that the rite of *Soenair* must fall through; but the Brahmins, who were to reap a golden harvest from this more than regal festivity, were equal to the occasion. They counselled discretion as the better part of valour, and pointed out to Jeichand that if he started for Delhi

he might not be able at once to subjugate the kingdom and enforce the attendance of Pithowra, and the day of the rite was near at hand. And with regard to the presence of the contumacious rajahs as essential to the proper observance of the ceremony, the wily priests suggested that, as they would not come in person, golden effigies of them might be made to take their place. Jeichand agreed, happy to find such a simple way out of his difficulty, and images were accordingly made, and the most servile posts assigned to them, that of the King of Delhi being porter of the hall, the most humiliating office a high-caste Hindu can perform.

When Pithowra away in his own kingdom heard of the indignity that had been offered to him in the matter of the golden effigy, he determined on revenge. And what he resolved upon was no less than to beard the lion in his den, and carry off in triumph the golden image that had been set up. No sooner had this romantic and daring scheme suggested itself to his mind than he proceeded to carry it out. He carefully disguised himself, and selecting five hundred picked warriors, proceeded secretly to Canouje, where the festivities were going on, a distance of rather more than two hundred miles. When he arrived at that city he mixed with the crowds in the public streets, and watching his opportunity, attacked the palace in the height of the festivity, seized the image, and with his followers around him cut his way out of the city to the open country and made good his retreat to his own dominions. It was a quixotic deed, and might have ended in his destruction;

but fortune favouring him, he escaped unhurt and added greatly to his former renown.

At Canouje nothing was talked about but the boldness and bravery of Pithowra, and Jeichand was mortified and cut to the heart. But upon no one did the valorous deed make so deep an impression as upon the Princess Sunjogta. In the inmost recesses of the zenana the story was related to her by her maid-servants, who had gathered the news from the bazaar, and the secluded fair one became desperately enamoured of the gallant Pithowra. When the hour came at the end of the *Soenair* for the princess to choose a husband, she rejected the prince that her father wished her to marry, and declared that she loved Pithowra and would marry no one else.

Jeichand was not unnaturally distressed, grieved and angry when he heard the decision of his daughter. It was hard enough that Pithowra, King of Delhi, should have carried off the golden image, but by that very deed to have won the affections of Sunjogta was like adding insult to injury. The monarch reasoned with his child and pleaded with her to accept the prince he had chosen for her as her husband; but the wilful lady said, 'Nay! nay! Pithowra is my chosen lord.' Then Jeichand waxed wroth, and declared that sooner than let his enemy Pithowra have his only child he would immure her for ever in a palace-prison. And thereupon the maiden was carried off into confinement, the monarch hoping that a few days of unaccustomed restraint would bring the erring damsel to a better

mind. But King Jeichand understood not womenkind, and found out to his sorrow that the plan he had adopted to coerce his child only made her the more determined to have her own way. By some means she managed to let Pithowra, the loved of her soul, know her feelings, and how harshly she was being treated in her father's court; and though she did not urge him to attempt her rescue, yet she very well knew that her communication would be sure to have that effect. And so it proved.

Pithowra, after he had captured the golden image which had been set up to his dishonour in the city of Canouje, had, as we have seen, fought his way back to his capital; but so severe had been his loss of devoted warriors that he would gladly have remained quiet for a time. However, no knight could remain at ease while his lady-love was in prison, and when the communication of Sunjogta reached Pithowra he declared it to be his fixed intention to set off at once to bear away the fair lady from the city of Canouje, though all the heroes of Hind blocked the way.

At the court of Delhi there were many brave men ready at any time to obey their king's behests without a word of questioning; but the men whom Pithowra now chose to accompany him in his dangerous adventure were the bravest of the brave. Like King Arthur of Britain, Pithowra had one hundred knights of the Round Table called *samants*, the very pick of India's chivalry, whose swords had never flashed in vain against the legions of the North, and who were sworn to a life of daring and

adventure. Calling these famous warriors together, the king declared his intention of rescuing Sunjogta, the fair maid of Canouje, from her prison, and of bringing her to Delhi as his bride. And when the knights heard the wish of their king they were glad, and cried aloud that they would follow him wherever he might lead, and conquer or die with him.

It was finally arranged that Chund, the great Rajpoot bard, should start for Canouje, there to chant the praises of Pithowra. Jeichand, it was well known, would respect the person of the bard, even though he sang the praises of an enemy, for bards were held in great reverence and honour throughout the land. Along with Chund, Pithowra was to go as a servant, and the hundred knights were also to disguise themselves and journey in the same train. This scheme, well planned, was ably executed, and Pithowra and his warriors found themselves at length in the very palace of their mortal enemy at Canouje. But the danger and difficulty of the undertaking only now commenced. One false move meant the failure of their enterprise and the destruction of everyone of them. If Jeichand only got a suspicion of the real character of the apparently obsequious attendants whom the bard Chund had brought with him, then the doom of the adventurous band was sealed.

Sir Edward Sullivan, in his 'Princes of India,' touching on the adventure of Pithowra, says: 'Love is but a dull stream without shoals and rapids, and Pithowra, like a true knight, only coveted the rose the more for the thorns that surrounded it. The seclusion of high-

caste Hindu women was not probably so strict as at present, but still their separation from the outer world has always been very close. The selfish treatment of the fairest part of the creation has recoiled on their oppressors; it has led to deceit, and vastly increased the aptitude for intrigue common to all Eastern ladies. Love, especially that which is forbidden, is a science freely discussed and carefully studied in the East. The difficulty of meeting and the necessity of making the most of the fleeting opportunities that do occur, have sharpened to a remarkable degree the apprehension of both sexes; and watched and guarded as they are, and apparently unapproachable, Eastern ladies have the reputation of being the greatest flirts and most successful intriguantes in the world.'

And Pithowra and Sunjogta soon demonstrated that neither stone walls nor iron bars could part those who truly loved, and were willing to risk life to be together. 'In a royal palace in the very centre of the capital of his most deadly enemy, whose pride and power he had recently publicly insulted, surrounded by foes, any one of whom would have risked much to take his life, did this daring lover of Hindustan carry on a communication with the lady of his affections.' And bribing her servants, and choosing a favourable opportunity, the fair maiden joined her royal lover, and the two with their followers managed to get outside the city walls. But not so fortunate as on a previous occasion, Pithowra was followed at once by his enemies in strong force. A desperate running fight of five days took place, and

bravely did Pithowra and his hundred knights of the Round Table maintain the struggle against thousands of their enemies. And they succeeded in their enterprise of carrying Sunjogta to Delhi, though at a frightful loss of brave lives. When Pithowra and his bride reached the capital, nearly all the gallant warriors who had fought so bravely in their service were left dead on the road. In the words of the bard Chund: 'He preserved his prize, and gained immortal renown, but he lost the sinews of Delhi.'

It was not to be expected that Jeichand, the injured father, would tamely submit to be robbed of his daughter, and have his power braved as Pithowra had braved it. But for some time he saw not his way to revenge. At length, however, for the sake of the destruction of his foe, he resolved to turn traitor to his country and invite Shahbudeen, the Mohammedan sovereign of Ghazni, who more than once had sought to obtain a footing in India, to come and assist in the conquest of Delhi, promising that monarch large possessions in Hindustan in return for his aid. And Shahbudeen gladly availed himself of the invitation, resolving in his own mind to take advantage of the disunion amongst the Indian princes to upset altogether the native dynasties, and to set up the rule of the Mohammedans in its place.

'It was a sultry evening, and the brave Pithowra and his youthful bride were enjoying themselves in the cool recesses of the zenana at Delhi, surrounded by the female attendants of the queen, who emulated each other in singing songs extolling the valour of their

king. Sunjogta delighted in the repetition of these verses, and, it is said, most of them were of her own composition, though they came ostensibly through Chund, the poet of the court. She loved her lord with an intense affection, and never tired of hearing his praises; and all his protestations to stop their recitation availed little, for the women of the palace delighted to please their youthful mistress. They were thus spending the evening hour with the light of the young moon just beginning to stream upon them, when intelligence was brought to the king of the combination that had been formed against him.'

Nothing could exceed the pleasure of Pithowra on receipt of the stirring news, for war was the breath of his nostrils, and the greater the odds were against him, the more ready he was to measure his strength with his foes. With a spring he left the side of his wife, and snatching his sabre from the wall, he cried, 'Bid our poets sing the stirring war-songs of our glorious forefathers, or let the voice of music be mute; the Kaffir waits for us on the field, and Pithowra has no appetite for love when thus bearded by his enemies.' The songs of the maidens were hushed, and they departed from the presence, and even Sunjogta spoke not; but she gazed with anxious love upon the countenance of her lord, and rising from her seat, flung her arms round his neck, her cheeks glowing, her eyes sparkling, and her beautiful form dilated with alarm, and with admiration of her courageous lord.

Early the next morning the forces of the king, thick,

serried, line upon line, column upon column, were spread before the gates of Delhi, anxiously awaiting the arrival of their chief and his friend, Samarsi, while the royal standard fluttered alone in imperial pride, its folds of gold glittering in the sunbeams like the ripples of the sea.

And why tarried the king? Within the zenana the lovely Sunjogta, with tears in her eyes, detained her lord for the moment, unwilling to allow him to go forth to the war. During the night the queen had had visions. Three times a phantom had passed before her, and had spoken to her words of strange import. 'Thy husband's life is on the Mohammedan's sword; beware!' was the first vision. In the next, she saw the king coming back from the war, his armour stained with blood, but not his own, while the phantom said unto her, 'Behold, he comes in glory! go and welcome him to thine arms.' But the third time, alas! alas! she saw her loved one bound in chains, lying on the floor of a dungeon in a far country, and the blood weltering from his wounds, while the exulting phantom said to her, 'His end is near.'

With these visions of the night fresh on her mind, Sunjogta might be excused for detaining her lord, and even for pleading that he would not leave her; but when Pithowra reminded her that she was a soldier's wife, and that he could fall but once in war—at the time the gods decreed—she suddenly dried her tears and said: 'My husband, thou hast taught me my duty. Go forth and conquer. Think not of me when you

charge the foe. If you fall I know how to follow you. Come with victory and fame, or come not back to these arms again! Death shall not part us; are we not one?' The prince gazed on the beautiful and excited face of his queen, and said proudly, 'Thus spoke a warrior's bride. Thy words shall be as a trumpet voice on the field of battle. Let him beware who crosses my path!'

It was on the plains of Tirouri that the battle was fought between Pithowra and the combined army of Jeichand and Shahbudeen. The King of Delhi was early singled out by Jeichand, who fell upon him with the fury of a tiger. But the wrath of the latter mastered his skill, and in a little while he found himself disarmed and at the mercy of his son-in-law. 'Rise up, old king,' said Pithowra, 'thou hast been a bitter enemy to me; but for my wife's sake, thy daughter, I spare thy life.' The next to encounter the strong arm of the King of Delhi was Shahbudeen. The contest between these two was deadly, for the Mohammedan was almost as good a swordsman as the Hindu, and perhaps physically the stronger. At length, however, a severe stroke brought the Kaffir to the earth, and Pithowra was about to despatch him with his dagger, when a number of picked Mohammedan soldiers came to the rescue and bore off their wounded chief.

Victory now declared for the valiant Pithowra, and the rout of his enemies was complete. The Mohammedans were pursued to the blue waters of the Nilab, and Jeichand retreated to Canouje with shame and confusion of face. When the news of her husband's victory

reached Sunjogta, she rose from her couch, which she had never left since his departure, and bathing and anointing her person, decked herself in her bridal garment and advanced at the head of her females to the outskirts of the city to welcome her lord. The moment he saw her, Pithowra dismounted, and giving her a warm greeting, whispered, 'The best part of thy vision, love, has proved to be true.' 'God be praised for it!' answered the queen, 'and may He avert the rest!'

But what is decreed must come to pass, and the doom of Pithowra was not long delayed. On his return to his capital he was so elated with his latest magnificent victory over his foes that he made the fatal mistake of despising them, and giving himself up to the agreeable society of the lovely Sunjogta, neglected to prepare himself against that revenge which his defeated enemies were determined to seek at the first opportunity. Jeichand and Shahbudeen, hearing of the festivities and gaieties at Delhi, as soon as possible gathered their discomfited forces together, thinking that they might be able to surprise the king and win by stealth what they had not been able to gain by force of arms. The two allies proceeded cautiously, and having raised a large army, possessed themselves unexpectedly of many strong places; but Pithowra, given up to the pleasures of the zenana, took no notice of events, and his generals were afraid to acquaint him with his misfortunes. Chund the bard, however, more privileged than even the greatest chiefs, entered the palace and boldly announced to the astonished king the victories of his

enemies, and the probability of his entire destruction unless he became once more the warrior he was of old.

That night the king had a dream of fearful import, which he related to the queen the following morning. 'While in the arms of sleep,' he said, 'a fair one, beautiful as Rambha, rudely seized my arm; then she assailed you, and while you were struggling with her, a mighty elephant bore down upon me. Sleep fled—nor Rambha nor elephant remained, but my heart was panting and my quivering lips muttering "Hur! hur!"' It should be explained that to see an elephant in sleep is considered by Hindus to be very unlucky and the word 'Hur! hur!' was the battle shout of the Rajpoots.

When Pithowra had related his dream he seemed dispirited, and as it was the first time his wife had seen him thus, her heart almost stood still for fear. But blaming herself for the unmanliness which seemed to have come over her lord, she sought lovingly and earnestly to brace him up for the struggle which was before him. 'Be not cast down,' she said, 'about the dream. It means victory and fame to my lord. Oh, sun of the Chohans, who has tasted so deeply as you of glory or of pleasure! To die is the destiny of man; all desire to throw off the old garment, and to die well is to live for ever. Think not of self, but of immortality; let your sword divide your foes. and I will be your *ardhanga* [other half] hereafter.'

Cheered and strengthened by these words, Pithowra went out to consult the princes and chiefs, and bade them get all ready for war, and he would lead them

forth to battle in person. Then he returned to his queen and consulted her as to coming events, and her remarks are very curious. 'Who,' she said, 'asks woman for advice? The world deems the understanding of women shallow; even when truths issue from their lips none listen thereto, yet what is the world without woman? We have the forms of Sacti with the fire of Siva. We are at once thieves and sanctuaries; we are vessels of virtue and of vice, of knowledge and of ignorance. The man of wisdom, the astrologer, can from the books calculate the motion and course of the planets, but in the book of woman he is ignorant; and this is not a saying of to-day, it has ever been so. Our book has not been mastered, and therefore, to hide their ignorance, men say, "In women there is no wisdom." Yet women share your joys and your sorrows. Even when you depart for the mansions of the sun, we part not. Hunger and thirst we cheerfully partake with you; we are as the lakes, of which you are the swans; what are you when absent from our bosom?'

But next day Sunjogta dropped altogether the philosopher and became the loving, passionate, devoted woman. When the troops were ready for departure, the fair lady said she would arm her lord herself for the battle. With trembling hands she began to adjust the beautiful armour on the manly form of her husband, but it was in vain she sought the rings of his corslet—her eyes were fixed on the face of her beloved as those of the famished wretch who finds a piece of gold. At last, however, the task was completed amidst sighs and tears,

and when the drum was beat as the signal for departure, she strained her husband to her breast, and pushing him fondly, and yet sadly, away, said, 'Go, my beloved, and may victory attend thy arms!' But when she was left alone she dropped on the floor of her apartment in a swoon, and when she came round all she would utter was, 'I shall see him again in the region of Gurya, but never more in Delhi.' And her prediction was fulfilled. The brave and gallant king fought with surpassing strength and zeal, and his devoted troops ably seconded his efforts; but he was outnumbered by a hundred to one, and all his valour was in vain, for his army was defeated and he himself made prisoner and carried off to Ghazni by Shahbudeen, and there the unfortunate Pithowra was bound with chains and died from his wounds on the floor of a dungeon, as had been revealed in visions of the night to his queen in the days of their prosperity and happiness.

And Sunjogta, when she heard of her warrior's fate, said that in death they should not be divided, and mounting bravely and calmly the funeral-pyre, she joined her lord in the mansions of the sun.

We would just add that Cuttub, the successful general of Shahbudeen, entered Delhi as a conqueror, and the Mohammedans thus obtaining a footing in India, soon turned their arms on Jeichand, although he had been their faithful ally, and the doom of Pithowra speedily overtook the traitor. Canouje shared the fate of Delhi. Thus all for the love of woman were the ancient dynasties of India overthrown.

IV.

SULTANA REZIA.

Sultana Rezia was the daughter of Altamish, King of Delhi. Altamish was the second Mohammedan ruler in succession from the famous Shahbudeen, who defeated Pithowra, the Rajpoot, and plucked the sovereignty of India out of the hands of the Hindus. The earliest information we have with regard to Altamish is that he was the favourite son of a great chief in Tartary; but like Joseph, the son of Jacob, he had incurred the jealousy of his brothers, who stripped him one day when out hunting, and traded him away to a company of slave-merchants who were passing at the time. By these merchants he was sold to a prince of Bokhara, in whose household he received a liberal education; but on the death of that prince he was again exposed for sale, and bought by a merchant, who carried him to Ghazni, the Mohammedan capital of Central Asia.

At Ghazni, the Emperor Mohammed, of Ghor, heard of the beauty and talents of Altamish, and desired to purchase him; but the merchant, his master, asked too high a price, and the slave was then taken back to

Bokhara, as none dared bid against the king. After a time, however, Cuttub, the favourite general of Mohammed, obtained his sovereign's permission to complete the purchase, which he did for fifty thousand pieces of silver. Altamish was now taken into the family of Cuttub, and becoming a general favourite, obtained his freedom, and rising step by step in favour, married the daughter of his friend and protector. At the death of Mohammed, Cuttub was raised to the imperial throne, and at the death of Cuttub, his son, Arun, was by general consent put on one side, and Altamish exalted to that high dignity.

To Altamish were born many children, the most remarkable of whom was his daughter, the Sultana Rezia, whose short but brilliant career we now sketch. The beauty of this young lady, which she inherited from her father, was marvellous. According to one writer of the period, it was 'sufficient to ripen the corn in the blade.' And not only was Rezia beautiful—she was wise and prudent beyond the majority of her own or the sterner sex. From her father, who was passionately fond of her, she received a liberal education, and was trained, not only in the usual duties of womankind, but in politics, and everything connected with affairs of state. Her mother, the queen, unfortunately, was a woman of strong passions and unprincipled habits, and was feared for her tyranny and cruelty, so that much of the good imparted by the king to his daughter was nullified by the unhealthy atmosphere of the zenana. However, notwithstanding all adverse influences, the

Princess Rezia grew up a thoughtful, studious, affectionate, pure-minded maiden, her father's favourite child, and the idol of the whole court.

As Rezia approached womanhood there was completed that wonderful and beautiful column, which is to be found at the present day at Delhi, called the Cuttub Minár. The cultured lady, we may be sure, was present when the tower, amidst great rejoicings, was declared complete, and she probably had a hand in composing those sentences engraved on the column, which refer in eulogistic terms to her valiant and renowned father. It is believed that the Minár was commenced by Cuttub, who laid the basement story either in his own honour or in honour of his generous benefactor, Mohammed, of Ghor. The column was then raised to five stories by Altamish, who took great pride in the work. The Minár is described as 'a tapering shaft, two hundred and thirty-four feet and one inch high, with a base diameter of forty-seven feet and three inches, and an upper diameter of nine feet, divided into five stories or balconies, and decorated with ornamental bands.' From the bottom to the top there is a spiral staircase, arranged as comfortably as possible for ascent, and from the top a magnificent view is obtained of the imperial city for miles around.

The Princess Rezia would watch the progress of the building of this wonderful tower with great delight, and when it was finished she was probably the first with the king to make the ascent and enjoy the view which was laid out before them. And on the second story she

would read, what visitors may still read, the following inscription in praise of her father Altamish:

'The great king; the exalted emperor; master of the necks of the people; the pride of the kings of Arabia and 'Ajni; God's shadow on earth; the son of the world and of faith; redresser of Islam and the Moslamin; the crown of kings and princes; the spreader of justice among mankind; great among the conquering powers; the light of the people of light; the helped from the sky; the conqueror of his enemies; the bright star of the firmament of sovereignty; the spreader of justice and mercy; the refuge of the countries of the earth; the revealer of the glorious words of God; Abul Muzaffer Altamish, sultan, ally of the Amir-ul-Momenia. May God perpetuate his country and his reign, and exalt his authority and his prestige.'

In A.D. 1226 Altamish left Delhi with a great army, with the intention of reducing those parts of Hindustan to the south which had so far remained independent. He was completely successful in this famous expedition; but it involved a six years' absence from the seat of empire, and when the question had to be settled who should administer the affairs of the central government while the emperor was away, the Princess Rezia was chosen before all her brothers, as being in every respect the best fitted to discharge the duties of that exalted office. When the emperor installed his daughter in the imperial throne until his return he spoke the following remarkable words to his chief court officials and princes: 'Know,' said he to his omrahs, 'that the burden of

power, too heavy for my sons, though there were twenty of them, is not so for the delicate Rezia; she has in her more spirit than they all.'

And the conduct of this lady, as the temporary head of the state, did not disappoint the expectations entertained of her. Though young, she set herself to her duties with all seriousness, and prayed to the God of heaven for guidance, strength and wisdom, and so well did she rule the land, with such justice and vigour, that even the princes, her brothers, had to acknowledge that their father had chosen wisely and done well, when he had exalted their sister over their heads. In 1232 Altamish returned to Delhi, and the princess gave up the reins of sovereignty into his hands, and resumed her ordinary position in the household as an affectionate and obedient daughter.

Four years later the emperor died, as he was about to set out on a journey to Multan, and deep and long was the grief of his loving daughter and friend. With the death of Altamish troubles began in the imperial family. His son, Ferose, ascended the throne, but he was a weak and wicked prince, and was entirely under the control of his still more wicked mother. Neglecting his duties and committing the government to the hands of the queen-dowager, the new monarch lavished his treasures on dancing-women, buffoons, and musicians, and the weakness of the emperor and the tyranny of the queen soon drove all ranks into rebellion. After a reign of seven months Ferose was deposed.

Now came the question, who should occupy the

imperial throne, and at once the eyes of all were turned on the princess, and at the earnest solicitations of the omrahs, she agreed to their request, and mounted the musnud as the Sultana Rezia. Then was seen in the East the unusual sight of a woman, at a time of great national disorder, becoming the supreme authority in the state, not secretly, but openly, and with the consent and approval of the nation.

Her elevation was not, however, altogether unopposed. Of two separate factions which had concurred in dethroning her brother, one was not very favourable to the sultana, purely on sentimental grounds, not relishing the idea of a woman reigning over them, though they could not question her wisdom and abilities. In a little time these grumblers gathered an army, and putting the vizier of the late king at its head, marched on Delhi, and defeated the sultana's forces. But what the fair lady could not do by her soldiers, she was able to do by her own wits. By a word of praise here and a smile there amongst her enemies, she succeeded in sowing dissensions amongst them, and the confederacy gradually dissolved, and left the individuals composing it at her mercy. Some of the most dangerous she caused to be put to death, but the majority she conciliated by her noble generosity, and erelong quiet was completely restored.

For more than two years all now went well with the sultana in her government. Her political address, we see, had been great, and her internal administration did not fall short of it. She appeared daily on the imperial throne in the usual habit of a sultan. Sir H. Elliot says:

'She discarded her female apparel and veil, wore a tunic and cap like a man, gave public audience, and rode on an elephant without any attempt at concealment.' With great earnestness and conscientiousness she gave herself up to her important duties of state. Without delay she reformed the abuses which had crept in under the last government, revised the laws, decided suits of importance, and evinced all the qualities of a just and able sovereign.

Nothing so far has been said about love or thoughts of marriage in the life of Rezia, for the simple reason that nothing is recorded in history. We have seen that as a girl she was very beautiful, and no doubt she had many admirers and suitors; but to all she seems to have given the cold shoulder, and until she had ascended the throne as sultana we find no reference to her feelings or inclinations. Then, however, she appears to have fallen in love with her master of the horse, who had come to India as an Abyssinian slave. This man was handsome and clever, and, it may be, not unworthy of the affections of the sultana; but the favours she showered upon him, added to the fact of his low origin, caused dissatisfaction amongst her nobles. It does not appear that anything could be brought against her fair fame, since her greatest breach of decorum was her allowing the Abyssinian to lift her on to her horse. Ferishta says to the honour of the sultana: 'Rezia Begum was endowed with every virtue, and those who scrutinize her actions most severely will find in her no fault but that she was a woman.'

And with a woman's passion she loved the handsome Abyssinian, and purposed exalting him, when a fitting opportunity came, to a place with her on the throne. But her love led to her ruin, for instead of raising the object of her affections, it resulted in her own downfall. The act which gave her omrahs warning of her intentions, and which provoked their wrath, was the exaltation of the favourite to the office of amir-al-omara, that is, commander of commanders, or general-in-chief.

The first omrah of note to revolt against the sultana was a Turki leader called Altunia. When Rezia heard that he had taken the field, she gathered together a large force and immediately marched against his fort of Batinda; but on her way her army mutinied, and her Abyssinian lover was seized and killed before her eyes. So grieved and angry was the sultana, that her generals felt that for their own safety they must seize her person, which they did at once, and, despite her entreaties, marched off with her to Batinda and delivered her into the hands of the rebel Altunia. Hurrying back to Delhi, they then raised to the throne her brother Behram, a base and abandoned wretch, and to this man they swore allegiance.

The sultana's former generals little knew what they were doing, however, when they delivered their queen into the hands of Altunia. That brave chief was touched by the misfortunes of the fair lady, and gave her her liberty at once. And still further, the warrior was so charmed with the person and manners of the

lovely sultana, that he proposed marriage to her. And she, admiring his generosity and respecting his bravery, agreed to the alliance. And well worthy of each other were this remarkable couple, and there was great rejoicing in the fort of Batinda when the nuptials were celebrated.

For a little time the sultana and her consort remained within the walls of the fortress, but at length they felt that there were other calls upon them than those of love, and so, collecting as many soldiers as they could and erecting the imperial banner, they started for Delhi, to dethrone the usurping prince.

Fortune, however, now deserted the cause of Rezia, and though her troops fought bravely in her service, their adversaries, united, were too strong for them. It was not, however, until two pitched battles had been fought, causing great destruction on both sides, that the sultana and her consort were taken prisoners. One would have thought that the remembrance of the past services of their monarch and her marvellous beauty would have led her subjects to spare her life; but they hardened their hearts and condemned the sultana and her husband to death. To the end the noble lady carried herself bravely, and when after a reign of three years and six months her sun went down in darkness, there were many who mourned the loss of their wise, able and beautiful queen.

V.

THE RANEE OF ARGAL.

THERE reigned about the year 1250 a Hindu prince in Argal, near the modern Allahabad, who dared to refuse to pay tribute to the Mohammedan Emperor of Delhi. This bold prince was named Gautum, and the heroine of our story was his wife. We know nothing of the lady's early days, and the incident which has made her famous occurred after her marriage.

Naserudin, a nephew of the beautiful but ill-fated Sultana Rezia, was at the time Emperor of India. This monarch was an able but an eccentric man. His private life, it is said, was that of a dervish. He defrayed all his personal expenses by copying books, and his fare was of the humblest description, and was cooked by his queen, to whom he allowed no female servant. Unlike the majority of Eastern potentates, he had but one wife, and no concubines.

When news reached Naserudin of the contumacy of Gautum, Rajah of Argal, he instructed the Governor of Oudh to march against the prince and chastise him. The governor essayed the task, but found the stout

rajah more than his match, for the imperial troops were defeated with very great slaughter, ten thousand being left dead upon the field of battle. The remnant retired with haste and fear, while the rajah marched back to his castle and proclaimed a feast in honour of the victory, to which high and low, gentle and simple, were invited.

'Proud was old Rajah Gautum
Of the victory he had gained;
Proud of his doughty clansmen
Who had the fight maintained;
Proud that no stain had fallen
Upon the Gautum name,
Which in the bygone ages
Had ne'er been brought to shame.
For he could boast of battles
Waged with Chauhân, Râthor,
And Rajpoot tribes illustrious
In warring times of yore;
In the days when who was strongest
Took what he deemed his right,
And held by fraud and cunning,
By courage, too, and might.'*

Day after day the festivities continued, and no one seemed more joyous than the ranee and her maidens, who looked after the comfort of the warriors who had fought the battles of their lord. So passed the royal banquet. But

'Joy dwelleth close to sorrow,
As night is close to dawn;
The sting is near the honey,
The rose is near the thorn.
Anxious the Ranee sitteth,
With eager upturned eye,

* Sherring's 'Hindu Pilgrims.'

Surrounded by her maidens,
Gazing upon the sky.
For they have seen the crescent
Of the pallid new-born moon ;
And they must in the Ganges
Bathe ere the next day's noon ;
Or on them and their children
Dire evils will descend,
On flocks and herds and homesteads—
Which may the gods forefend !'

The people of India are at the present day, perhaps, more superstitious than any other race, and at the time of which we are writing superstition had even a stronger hold upon the people than it has now. At the sight of the new moon the ranee and her female attendants were filled with fear, for it was their belief that unless they could bathe in the holy Ganges at such a season great disasters would visit their homes. And unfortunately the banks of the Ganges were just then in the possession of their deadly foes.

To speak to the rajah his good lady felt was out of the question while the festivities proceeded, for in all probability he would bid her omit that month the sacrifices of the new moon. So the devout lady in solitude thought the matter over, and resolved that that night when the feast had commenced she would slip out with her maidens and hurry down to the bathing ghât at Buxar, only a few miles away, and after bathing there the first thing in the morning, hurry back again to the castle.

'The infant moon had vanished,
But the stars were clear and bright,
When the Ranee and her maidens
Started alone that night.
No escort went to guard them,
They sought no warrior's aid;
Their strength lay in their virtue,
And they were not dismayed.
The guests and merry Rajah
Had the evening meal begun,
When issuing from the palace
They stole out one by one,
And met in the silent courtyard
Of the temple of the sun.
They passed beyond the temple—
They passed the tank and lawn—
So lightly and so noiseless
No sound on the breeze was borne.'

And with eager steps they went on their way during the darkness of the night, passing through wood and dale, and by house and hamlet, staying not to rest even for a moment, and when the morning broke they found themselves by the river of their desire.

'Before them rolling grandly,
Bright with the sun's red beam,
More heavenly than earthly
Appeared the hallowed stream,
Mother of mighty rivers,
Adored by saint and sage,
The much-loved peerless Gunga,
Famous from age to age.'

And as the ranee and her maidens stood at a little distance gazing at the sacred waters, the shouts of the early bathers fell on their ears, and with swift steps and

glad hearts they hastened forward and arrived at length at the Ghât Buxar.

'The ghât was long and spacious,
Teeming with devotees,
As swarms the sky with locusts
Or hive with clustering bees.
Some were the stairs ascending,
Their sacred duties o'er—
Some eager downwards hurried,
And passed the throng before—
Some counted beads while praying,
Ending where they begun—
Some pourèd forth libations
In honour of the sun—
Some sat in meditation
With eyes fixed on the ground,
Unconscious of the shifting
Of everything around—
Some in the water standing,
Worshipped the flowing stream—
Worshipped the sky above them—
Worshipped the golden beam.

'The Ranee to her maidens
Her shoes and jewels gave;
And then the ghât descended
And plunged beneath the wave—
The wave by every Hindoo
Entered with pious awe,
Believing thus salvation
Is gained for evermore;
And every drop that falleth
On him that plungeth in
One sin at least remitteth,
One great and deadly sin.

'The Ranee and her maidens
With care performed the rite,
And from the hallowed waters
Drew exquisite delight.

On nostrils and on eyelids
Their fingers firmly pressed,
They sank, while high above them
The flood their hair caressed ;
And every limb and feature,
And all their streaming hair,
Received its sacred virtue,
Mysterious and rare ;
And every spot was moistened,
From head down to the feet :
And the evil one no longer
In the body held his seat.
(Such is the mystic cleansing
Of Gunga's holy stream !
Such are the strange imaginings
Of a Hindoo's waking dream !)"

The adventure of the ranee had so far passed off successfully, but it was scarcely to be expected that such a lady could visit the ghât at Buxar to bathe without attracting attention and causing many questions to be asked. Very soon it reached the ears of the Governor of Oudh, who was in the district chafing under his late defeat, that a lovely matron with her maidens was keeping the festival of the new moon at the ghât. He questioned his followers as to her name and rank, but no one knew, so he sent off his own daughters to converse with the stranger, and find out, if possible, who she was. Soon the ladies returned to say that the visitor was none other than the Ranee of Argal.

Then was the revengeful governor glad that the wife of his enemy was in his power, and carried away by passion, he gave the order that as the ranee left the ghât she was to be surrounded and captured. Unconscious of

her danger, and eager now to be back in her husband's castle, the Lady of Argal turned her face homewards, but she had gone only a little way when she was aware that her path was blocked and that enemies were crowding around. Soon from one, apparently the leader of the crowd, came the cry:

'"Capture the wife of Argal,
Seize her, our lawful prize."
* * *
"Seize her," again he shouted,
"For the honour of our name.
For the blood shed by proud Argal,
Who put our sons to shame."'

It was a trying moment for the poor lady, but she flinched not, and proved herself to be a worthy wife of a brave and gallant chief.

'Though fear was in her bosom,
The Ranee shed no tear;
And her eye resentful sparkled
As the enemy drew near.
She stood there brave and scornful,
Her maidens by her side;
And with undaunted calmness
Ajoodhya's chief defied:—
"Shame on the dastard chieftain
Whose host the battle fled,
Pursued by Argal's heroes,
By mighty Argal led!
Shame on Ajoodhya's warriors
Who safety sought in flight;
And beaten—base—revengeful—
With women wish to fight!"

'Then, on a great stone standing,
She turned to face the crowd,
Courageous and disdainful,
Determined, fierce, and proud.
"Of princely blood, a Gautum,
Of a noble Rajpoot clan,
He yields to none, my husband—
And never did—or can.
By enemies surrounded,
I cannot—will not—fly;
For him, my gallant husband,
I'm ready now to die.
Are there no Rajpoot clansmen,
No Rajpoot brothers here,
To whom a Rajpoot mother
And Rajpoot wife is dear?
If such there be, arouse ye!
Stand forth, stand forth, to aid!
By the gods I do adjure ye,
My cause on you is laid."'

Scarcely had these burning words left the lips of the ranee than her foes were upon her, but at the same moment rose a cry 'To the rescue!' Two Bais Rajpoots, Ubhai Chand and Nirbhai Chand, with a few followers, were in the crowd, and these brave men sprang upon the enemy with a shout. In a few moments they cut their way with their heavy brands to the side of the ranee, who had with her maidens been stoutly defending herself from the grasp of the ruffians around; and then with a mighty effort they opened a path through the crowd, and with the lady in their midst sought to reach Argal. But it was a desperate struggle, for the enemy followed them through the streets and lanes, and every foot of the way had to be won at the sword's point, and

many were the bleeding, the maimed, and the dying they left behind.

At length the gallant Nirbhai was struck down, and Ubhai was left with his men to fight alone. But succour was at hand, for a rumour of the conflict had reached the rajah, and with a chosen band he came hurrying to the rescue of his noble lady, and half-way between Buxar and Argal he met the little party, and was just in time to save them from destruction. The enemy turned and fled, and the rajah was too glad to see his wife safe and sound to care about pursuing them just then.

What a meeting that was upon the road! How much had to be explained, and what thanks had to be given to the valiant Ubhai for his brave and timely services! All mourned the loss of Nirbhai, but yet the occasion was one for joy, that any of their lives had been spared, and with sadness and yet with rejoicing the party returned to Argal:

'And there were happy greetings,
And plenteous tears were shed—
Young wives the Ranee lauded,
Though old ones shook their heads.
But all rejoiced to see her,
And with one voice did tell
How the Ranee and her maidens
Had fought so brave and well.'

After a few days it was felt that something more substantial than words of praise should be bestowed upon Ubhai, and though he was of inferior caste, the rajah out of the depth of his gratitude gave him his daughter in marriage, and with her as dowry all the

lands on the north of the Ganges over which the Gautum bore rule. He also bestowed on his son-in-law the title of rao, which is still the highest dignity amongst the Baises.

'For generations many
The country borders rang
With Ubhai's fame and Nirbhai's
Wherever people sang.
But greater was the glory,
And greater the renown,
Of the Ranee and her maidens
In village and in town,
When in the winter gloaming,
Around the hamlet's fire,
The rustics sat and freely
Discoursed of son and sire.
As night advanced, and grandly
The stars shone in the sky,
Each told his best-known story,
And made the minutes fly.
But that which most excited,
Which always drew a tear,
With which they rose, and parted,
And heard with boisterous cheer,
Was the tale of the noble women
Which each was proud to tell,
How the Ranee and her maidens
Had fought so brave and well.'

And what was the fate of the churlish Governor of Oudh? He was disgraced by the emperor, and friend and foe upbraided him for his base attack on the Ranee of Argal:

'When white with age, and feeble,
Still then he bore the shame,
That he had wielded weapon
Against a noble dame.'

VI.

DEWAL DEVI, PRINCESS OF GUZERAT.

GUZERAT, or Gujarat, is the name given to the northern maritime province of the Bombay Presidency. Dr. Hunter thus defines it: 'It includes the peninsula of Kathiawar, and is bounded on the north by Rajpootana, on the east by the spurs of the Vindhya and Satpura ranges, on the south by the Konken, and on the west by the sea.' In 1881 Guzerat had a total area of 70,038 square miles, and a total population of 9,779,780, or more than one-half the population of the Bombay Presidency.

Our story takes us back, however, to the close of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century, and what the exact size and strength of the kingdom was at that date it is impossible to say. There can be no doubt, however, that it was large and powerful, probably little inferior to what it is at present.

Our heroine, Dewal Devi, was the only daughter of the brave but unfortunate Kurrun Rai, the Rajah of Guzerat. In the year 1297 A.D. Guzerat was invaded by order of Ala-ud-din, the Mohammedan Emperor of Delhi; and though the rajah defended his kingdom with

great spirit and indomitable courage, he was forced at length to flee and to leave his possessions in the hand of the enemy. Dewal Devi fled with her father, but Cumla Devi, the wife of Kurrun Rai and the mother of Dewal Devi, was unfortunately taken prisoner and carried off a captive to Delhi.

Let us look for a moment at the fate which overtook Cumla Devi at the capital of the Mohammedan Empire, for this event had much to do with the later eventful incidents in the life of her daughter. As so often happened when princesses, even of Hindu houses, were captured by Mohammedan rulers, Cumla Devi was taken into the zenana of the Emperor Ala-ud-din. And soon her beauty, talents, and accomplishments gained for her the undivided affection of that monarch, and she shone in the best and most sumptuous apartments of the palace with all the splendour of Eastern magnificence.

And it is said that, transported with an emperor's passion, Cumla Devi put away from her the loves and memorials of the past, and sought to forget that she had ever been the wife of Kurrun Rai, the Rajah of Guzerat. Cynics who deride woman's faithfulness may cite Cumla Devi with justice as a prominent instance of an inconstant wife.

But though Cumla Devi could put out of her mind and affection her unfortunate husband, her mother's heart pined after her daughter; and after a little while she frankly confessed to the emperor that, though she was happy in his love and favours, there was a yearning that she longed to have gratified, and that was the possession

of Dewal Devi, who had gone with her father into exile after he had lost his throne and kingdom. Then Ala-ud-din swore by the beard of the Prophet that the beloved of his heart should have her wish. Thereupon he gave commandment to his governors and princes that they were all, as opportunity arose, to bend their energies to the capture of the maiden.

When Kurrun Rai was defeated he fled to Baglana, the nearest port of the Deccan to the dominions he had lost, and there he hoped not only to hold his own, but in time to gather together forces for an attempt to recover Guzerat. And Dewal Devi dwelt with him, and was the sharer of his sorrows and the confidante of his hopes.

And the maiden is described at that time, when verging on her fifteenth year, as pre-eminently beautiful. 'Her eyes were dark, wild, and timorously shy, yet brilliant as the purest gems; her lips were as red as the red lotus, her hair of the raven's hue, and her whole figure combined loveliness with majesty, while the lightness of her step bore comparison only with the elasticity of her heart.'

Like all Indian maidens, Dewal Devi thought much of love and marriage, and often wondered who of note would espouse her now that her father had lost his throne. And one day when her heart was full of those musings, and she was strolling at sunset in the fields around the fortress of Baglana, a wandering gipsy met her, one of that ubiquitous race to be found the world over, and accosted her with the question 'Wouldst thou, fair maiden, know thy future destiny? Let me see thy

hand!' And the little hand was presented with fear and trembling for scrutiny, and after much consideration the gipsy queen gave the mysterious information in tones of triumph: 'The thread of thy life shall be mingled with a foreign yarn.' But there the foretelling ended, and the maiden hurried back to the castle far from satisfied.

As if in fulfilment of the prophecy of the gipsy, very soon after this there came a request from the Rajah of Deogiri, a Mahratta prince, for the hand of the princess, for his son and heir Sunkuldeo. Now, Rajpoot women in those days held alliances with Mahrattas to be almost as degrading as those with Mohammedans, so that Dewal Devi did not take kindly to the proposal when her father broke the news to her. Then, besides the obligation of caste, the young lady knew the suitor in question and did not regard him with favour. Sunkuldeo was an ill-looking and exhausted debauchee, who, though on the sunny side of thirty, had already long outlived his youth, and thus it was very excusable in a young and lovely maiden to shrink with aversion from such an alliance.

Kurrun Rai, however, was in favour of the match, mainly because the Rajah of Deogiri was at enmity with the Emperor Ala-ud-din, and as his daughter did not venture to express her inward dislike, he interpreted her silence as acquiescence, and sent back word to Deogiri that everything was satisfactorily arranged and that he would be glad to bestow his child upon Sunkuldeo. And Dewal Devi, remembering the saying of the gipsy queen, 'The thread of thy life shall mingle

with a foreign yarn,' resigned herself to what she conceived to be her fate.

But now came an altogether unexpected turn of events. Ala-ud-din having resolved to punish and bring to subjection Ramdeo, the Rajah of Deogiri, sent an army against him under the leadership of the eunuch Malik Cafeer. Alaph Khan, who had been appointed Governor of Guzerat, the conquered kingdom, was also instructed to co-operate with the eunuch, and to this general was given in addition private instructions from the emperor himself to take Baglana by the way, and see if he could not come to terms with the ex-rajah, Kurrun Rai, so that in return for being left in peace he might give up his daughter, Dewal Devi. But the indignant father refused, and said that the emperor should only obtain his child over his dead body.

When Alaph Khan was convinced that his overtures were useless, he resolved on war, and marched with his army against Baglana, and defeated and dispersed the rajah's army. But his victory, after all, afforded him little satisfaction, for when he entered the fortress he found that both Kurrun Rai and Dewal Devi had escaped him. The whereabouts of the rajah he soon discovered, but he was safe from pursuit. The hiding-place of Dewal Devi—for she was not with her father—he could not, however, trace, and thereat he was much distressed; for knowing the anxiety of Cumla Devi to regain her daughter, and her influence over the emperor, he feared to send to Delhi news of his failure. With a troubled heart he therefore turned his face

towards Deogiri to perform the second part of his duty, in assisting to capture that fortress, hoping against hope that his agents whom he left behind would be able to discover traces of the missing lady.

And where all the time was Dewal Devi hidden? Her father, when Baglana was besieged, had sent her off under an escort on the road to Deogiri, that she might be married to her intended husband, who probably would be better able to protect her than himself. Kurrun Rai, however, had given the escort instructions, if the way were blocked, or if danger threatened near Deogiri, to hide Dewal Devi for a time in the caves of Ellora. And this had been done. When the lady drew near to Deogiri she found that that fortress also was threatened with siege by command of the emperor, and not being very eager, but, as we have seen, somewhat loth to be united with the House of Deogiri, she gladly availed herself of the alternative course of going into hiding at Ellora—at any rate for a season. If the marriage, she said, must be later on, it must be; but if Sunkuldeo wanted her he must wait for her.

The celebrated caves of Ellora in which the princess was hidden, are at the present day one of the great sights of India. They are excavated in the face of a hill, and run nearly north and south for a quarter of a mile. They are divided into three distinct series, the Buddhist, the Brahminical, and the Jain, and are arranged almost chronologically. Fergusson, in his 'History of India and Eastern Architecture,' speaks of the chief building, called the Kailas, as one of the most

wonderful and interesting monuments of architectural art in India. 'Its beauty and singularity always excite the astonishment of travellers. . . . It is not a mere interior chamber cut in the rock; but is a model of a complete temple, such as might have been erected on the plain. The rock has been cut away externally as well as internally.' And yet so cunningly have these cave temples been devised and arranged, that owing to an outer wall of rock with an entrance through it, the excavations are not generally seen from the outside at all, and a person might pass along their front without being aware of their existence unless warned of the fact.

Perhaps a month after Dewal Devi had romantically taken up her abode in the caves of Ellora, a party of Mohammedan soldiers with Alaph Khan at its head went to view the caves, not for a moment dreaming that the princess, about whose sudden and mysterious disappearance they were troubled, would be thus discovered. 'The party entered by the southern portal, a handsome gateway cut through the solid rock. In the compound to which this gave admittance stood a magnificent temple, elaborately ornamented with complex sculpture, which, though much injured by time, retained traces of great beauty. Most of the representations were of heathen deities, which the followers of the prophet were bound to regard with horror, notwithstanding their value as works of art. But those which represented warriors and battlefields, bull-fights, and the figures of animals generally, they were not cynical enough to condemn. They viewed with wonder the works of a people whom

they were habituated to regard with contempt. The massive steps, the colossal pillars, the handsome obelisks, and the gigantic figures, all carved out of the solid rock, seemed to have required the energy of preternatural beings to construct them, and as the visitors passed from one excavation to another to look at them, they could not suppress their admiration and wonder.'

Having thoroughly, as they thought, examined the caves, Alaph Khan and his soldiers were about to retrace their steps to go back to camp, when the accidental ruffling of garments betrayed the presence in an adjoining grotto of two females, one a beautiful maiden, evidently of high lineage, and the other a more elderly lady, presumably an attendant. When the ladies found they were discovered they at once took to flight, and though they were followed, they outstripped their pursuers, running through labyrinthine alleys with which the strangers were unfamiliar.

Alaph Khan had no suspicion of the value of the prize that had escaped him, for he imagined Dewal Devi was in hiding in another part of the country altogether; but, still, he spent hours in searching for the ladies, for the beauty of the younger of the two had touched his heart. It was in vain, however, that every nook and corner of the caves was explored, for not a trace of the fugitives could be discovered. And the Brahmins who conducted the soldiers pretended not to know anything about the fair ones, and affected to be astonished that such had entered the precincts of the cave without their knowledge.

After a long search, Alaph Khan, despairing of finding the ladies without the aid of the priests, drew the chief Brahmin on one side, and slipping gold into his hand, said: 'Now tell us, friend, whereabouts they are.' 'In full march for Deogiri, I suppose,' was the reply. 'For Deogiri! Do they belong to that house?' 'Not yet, but soon,' was the enigmatical answer.

Still in the dark, the general was only chagrined that he had not caught the lovely woman in the caves. 'Shall we give chase?' 'Is it worth while?' he said, turning to his men. 'Yes, let us go!' the soldiers answered at once. And in a few minutes the Mohammedans were in hot pursuit, and after an hour or more of hard riding came up with the princess, who, however, had a larger escort than Alaph Khan had bargained for. But the Moslem cavaliers after a sharp struggle dispersed the Hindus, and the ladies were in their power. Much alarmed, but yet preserving her dignity, the princess alighted from her palanquin, and in answer to a question from the leader of the party, said boldly: 'I am Dewal Devi, daughter of the fugitive Rajah of Guzerat. Am I your prisoner?'

If the heavens had fallen, Alaph Khan could not have been more astonished than he was on hearing this declaration. The lady whom he supposed was in hiding far away in the south, and whom he had left agents to discover, if possible, was here before him, in the neighbourhood, almost at the gates, of the fortress of Deogiri. And he soon obtained the information that she was on her way to marry Sunkuldeo, the son of the contumacious

rajah whom he had been sent to punish. But astonishment with the general soon gave place to other feelings, and falling on his knees before the princess, he said: 'Lady, I am your slave, but my orders are to escort you to Delhi.'

Thus strangely and unexpectedly was Dewal Devi secured, when hope seemed at the lowest ebb, and when the princess was within a stone's throw of her destination. No time was lost by Alaph Khan in bearing off his prize to the court of his master, and great was the joy of Cumla Devi, the erring mother. And Dewal Devi, it must be confessed, was not much grieved at the turn events had taken. She was deeply sorry to be carried so far away from her gallant sire, whom she reverenced and loved, but, on the other hand, it was a relief to have escaped from her affianced husband, the odious Sunkuldeo.

In the emperor's palace a suite of rooms was placed at the disposal of the maiden, near to her mother's, and though at first mother and child felt estranged and spoke to each other coldly, by degrees natural feelings asserted themselves and the two were reconciled. And now everything was done to make Dewal Devi happy, and to reconcile her to lasting separation from her father. And in time, though she never forgot her parent far away in exile and enduring great hardships, she gave up grieving about him. Daily she prayed to the gods for him, and she fondly hoped that brighter days would come for the much-tried rajah, but it was not to be. The lion-hearted old man died in lonely exile, grieving to the end at the separation from his wife and daughter.

And how fared it still later with Dewal Devi? Shoshee Chunder Dutt in his 'Bengaliana' tells us:

'It was a clear evening, and the princess was sitting by a latticed window that overlooked the beautiful zenana gardens at Delhi, dreaming of things which maidens only will think of. Suddenly the door of her apartment opened, and to her surprise Prince Khizer, the eldest son of the Emperor Ala-ud-din, stood before her. She rose with downcast eyes to receive him, and her cheeks were suffused with blushes. Her agitation served only to heighten her charms, and the prince stood with arms folded, keeping his eyes steadily fixed on her beauty, as if speechless with astonishment. At last Dewal Devi broke the silence.

'"What seeks the emperor's son in the apartment of his slave?"

'"Permission to throw himself at your feet, lady," said the impassioned Khizer, and he knelt before her.

'The vows and loves of the prince were poured into a willing ear. He was young, handsome, and brave, accomplishments which the maiden's heart acknowledged with a throb, and his sweet disposition obtained an easy conquest over her affections.

'The festivals which celebrated the royal nuptials were grand and sumptuous, and the loves of the happy pair have been deservedly immortalized by the poet Khusreo, the greatest genius of his age.

'Thus was the gipsy's prophecy fulfilled: "The thread of thy life shall be mingled with a foreign yarn."'

VII.

PUDMINI OF CHEETORE.

In 1275 A.D. the boy Lakumsi succeeded to the sovereignty of the Hindu kingdom of Mewar, of which Cheetore, the repository at that time of all that was precious of the arts of India, was the capital city.

During the minority of Lakumsi, his uncle, Bheemsi, ruled the land; and being a man of great ability and bravery, and loyal to his nephew, the state escaped those internal quarrels which have so often proved the weakness and ruin of Indian kingdoms when a minor was on the *guddi*.

Pudmini, whose wonderful history and sad fate we design to sketch, was the wife of Bheemsi. Her early life was spent, we suppose, in the beautiful island of Ceylon, for her father was Hamir Sank of that land. But of the days of youth and early womanhood of our heroine we know nothing, as history only takes up the thread of her life from the time of her marriage with Bheemsi of Cheetore.

The very name of this lady speaks of her charms of person, as Pudmini was a title only bestowed on the

superlatively fair. And the graces of mind and heart seem in this case to have been as pleasing as the outward appearance, and in all generations her matchless beauty has formed the inspiring theme of the bards of Hindustan.

Unhappily for the peace of herself, her husband and relatives, the story of the wonderful loveliness of Pudmini travelled to Delhi, and the imagination of the Pathan Emperor Ala-ud-din was inflamed by the descriptions he received of the houri of Cheetore, and he determined to become the possessor of such a prize. Already Ala-ud-din had in his harem Cumla Devi, the beautiful wife of Kurrun Rai, the defeated Rajah of Guzerat, but the possession of one fair Hindu princess only made the licentious Mohammedan the more eager to obtain another, who from all accounts would prove to be fairer still.

Having already real or imaginary causes of offence towards the princes of Rajpootana, the emperor, with the additional incentive of obtaining possession of the lovely Pudmini, declared war against them, and sent a powerful army to the city of Cheetore. After a weary march of several months the imperial troops arrived at the walls of that strong city and fortress and laid siege to it, but the skill of Bheemsi and the bravery of his vassals, added to the almost impregnable character of the place, defied the utmost efforts of the besiegers, and for once Ala-ud-din had to think of giving up an undertaking that he had set his heart upon and begun with such ardour.

Some of his counsellors, however, urged the emperor to seek to obtain by cunning and deceit what he could not win by the force of his arms. And in pursuance of this object the following stratagem was arranged. A demand was sent to Bheemsi simply for a sight of the extraordinary beauty who was the real cause of the siege, with the promise that Ala-ud-din would immediately thereafter withdraw his troops and return to Delhi. Bheemsi, with no little diplomacy, agreed to the request on two conditions, viz., that the emperor should enter Cheetore with only a few followers, and that Pudmini should be seen only through the medium of several mirrors. This was not what Ala-ud-din wished, for it gave him no opportunity for carrying off the lady by force; but still he declared his approval, for it suggested to him another, though baser, way of gaining his ends.

The strange scene was therefore witnessed one bright April day—perhaps the first day of April—of a Mohammedan emperor entering a Hindu city, and spending an hour standing before a looking-glass gazing with undisguised admiration upon the reflected charms of a Rajpoot princess. It was doubtless good fun for the Mohammedan, but it was wormwood and gall to the chivalrous Hindus, who esteemed the honour of their women far above all earthly considerations. The proud warriors fretted and fumed with indignation and anger, that the wife of their ruler should be subjected to the humiliation of showing her face and form to a Kaffir, even through the reflection of a dozen mirrors; but

as the condition of the withdrawal of the enemy from the walls of their city they bore the insult and restrained their wrath.

The interview over, Ala-ud-din withdrew. His entry into the city at all with a small escort was like walking into a lion's den; but the emperor knew sufficient of the character of the Rajpoots to trust to their honour, if a promise of safety were once given. But though he could appreciate good faith in others, he had not the greatness of character to show it himself, and this want of true honour and manliness now enabled him to gain the advantage over the ruler of Cheetore. Turning to Bheemsi, he said: 'Come with me to the foot of the fortress, and there we will part as friends.' And the Rajpoot, unwilling to be outdone in confidence, accompanied the emperor to the place he mentioned; but with unequalled deceit Ala-ud-din had prepared an ambush, and Bheemsi was at once seized and borne off triumphantly to the enemies' camp.

There was great sorrow in Cheetore when the capture of their prince was known, and it was increased almost to despair when the insulting message came that the liberty of Bheemsi was dependent upon the surrender of the beautiful Pudmini to the emperor. The anguish of the lady who was the cause of all these troubles was something pitiable—'Her eyes became lustreless, her cheeks wan and pale, and her lovely face began to lose its charms.' And so for a week sorrow reigned supreme in Cheetore and in the royal palace. The difficulty was to know what to do, for while Rajpoot honour forbade

even the thought of the surrender of Pudmini, the loss of Bheemsi was deeply felt, as there was no one to replace him in the position he had filled as the guardian of Lakumsi, the young rana, and as the Lord Protector of Mewar.

But now woman's wit came to the rescue, and Pudmini proposed a scheme which, though beset with difficulties and dangers, was just such as brave knights would welcome with delight. The scheme was to meet guile with guile, and deceit with deceit. Word was to be sent to Ala-ud-din that the object of his desires would be given up to him, and permission was to be asked for her to be accompanied by a large train of females and handmaids, such as befitted her high station. Goorah, a prince of Ceylon, an uncle of Pudmini, was deputed to visit Ala-ud-din and make all the necessary arrangements. When he appeared before the emperor and declared the terms of surrender, that monarch was delighted. 'Hurry back, my friend, at once,' he said, 'and let Pudmini come attended as she likes best, and as befits a future Empress of Delhi.' But when the prince suggested that besides the train of female attendants Pudmini should have with her a small retinue of armed men, the merry emperor replied: 'No, no! we don't permit that. We like not an enemy's forces in our camp. Take our assurance that no soldier shall dare to violate the sanctity of female decorum and privacy or disobey our commands.'

On the day appointed, the state palanquin of Pudmini was seen to leave the gates of Cheetore, and all but those

in the secret supposed that the fair lady was within, but in her place was Bedul, a young and brave relative, fully armed for battle, while Pudmini remained in seclusion in her palace. Along with the state palanquin went seven hundred others supposed to contain the handmaids of the princess, but in reality containing the bravest knights of Cheetore. And the seven hundred palanquins were each borne by six armed soldiers disguised as porters, so that nearly five thousand warriors were thus transported into the heart of the Pathan camp.

When the procession reached its destination, Goorah stepped forward and demanded the liberty of Bheemsi, but Ala-ud-din with a smile shook his head and said: 'Not yet, my friend. Your prince shall be liberated after I have married his wife; till then, let the gold I give thee keep thee in humour.' Goorah's face was overcast, but recovering his self-possession, he observed: 'Pudmini requests as a favour from her future lord that she may be granted a last interview with her present husband.'

The supposed Rajpoot woman had been received in a rich pavilion erected near the emperor's tent, and thither Bheemsi, by permission of Ala-ud-din, was conducted, and half an hour was allowed for a private interview. The impatient monarch, however, waited at the entrance to the pavilion set aside specially for the use of Pudmini, and as the lord protector's stay with his wife was prolonged over the time appointed, he began to be angry, and unable to control himself, he

suddenly burst into the apartment. Great was his consternation when, instead of finding there the fair object of his affections, he beheld conversing with Bheemsi a youthful warrior of gigantic proportions, fully armed for battle.

'Treachery! treachery!' shouted the emperor, and his guards rushed in in haste. 'Down with the infidels!' exclaimed Bheemsi, and at the cry the flower of Mewar chivalry crowded around their prince. Bedul, the young warrior, pounced upon Ala-ud-din like a tiger, and the throne of Delhi would have been rendered speedily vacant if some of the royal guards had not rushed to the rescue and at the sacrifice of their own lives saved that of their emperor.

A fierce and bloody contest now ensued, the Mohammedan party gaining rapidly in numbers and strength as the true state of affairs became known throughout the camp. The surprise was sudden, but all the Hindus could hope to do, was to get away with their prince. A fleet horse was in reserve for Bheemsi, upon which he mounted, and then it was a race for life; but the escape was successfully accomplished, though the choicest of the heroes of Cheetore died in keeping back the emperor's troops. Of the five thousand who went forth in the pride of strength in the morning, but few in the evening returned to their homes.

And of the brave men that died, the noble Goorah was one. Well had he played his part, and his death was a great loss to Cheetore; but as it was death upon the field of battle and in defence of his chief, it was a

cause rather of rejoicing than of grief. His widow, who prepared for death at once upon the funeral-pyre, is said to have spoken thus to Bedul, who was with her lord to the last: 'How did my lord conduct himself, my boy?' And the brave stripling answered: 'He was the reaper of the harvest of battle; I followed his steps as the humble gleaner of his sword. On the gory bed of honour he spread a carpet of the slain; a barbarian prince his pillow, he laid him down, and sleeps surrounded by the foe.' Again the lady said: 'But tell me, Bedul, how did my love behave?' 'Oh, mother!' exclaimed the youth, 'how further describe his deeds, when he left no foe to dread or admire him!' Thereupon the *sati* smiled farewell, and adding, 'My lord will chide my delay,' sprang into the devouring flame.

Though the death of so many heroes, and especially of her kinsman, Goorah, was a great grief to Pudmini, yet great was her joy, and great was the rejoicing of the whole city, that Bheemsi, the lord protector, had been rescued.

But there was little time for forms of thanksgiving, for Ala-ud-din with his forces was at the gate of the fortress. With eagerness did the Rajpoots sally forth to meet the enemy, and animated by the noblest sentiments—the deliverance of their chief and the honour of his princess—they fought like lions, and though the Mohammedans outnumbered them, yet did they drive them back with great slaughter, and Ala-ud-din was compelled to raise the siege and return to Delhi.

But the emperor, though defeated and crippled in his

resources, did not give up his determination to win the lovely Pudmini. Indeed, his eagerness to possess the great prize became greater than ever, and straining every nerve, he gathered together fresh troops, and after a few years set out on another expedition against Cheetore, vowing this time that he would not give up the siege until he obtained the object of his desires or levelled the city with the ground. This was early in the fourteenth century.

News of the approaching invasion speedily reached Cheetore, of which Bheemsi was now rana, the lad Lakumsi having died in the interval. But so weakened was the fortress by former onslaughts, and so few comparatively were now the defenders, that there seemed to be no hope of successfully coping with the fresh legions of Ala-ud-din's armies. But yet Bheemsi, inspired by his devoted queen, Pudmini, determined to resist unto death, and they solemnly pledged one another that they would never fall into the hands of the emperor alive.

For a time the defence was maintained with vigour, but Ala-ud-din carried on his attack persistently, until at length he obtained the hill at the southern point, which was the key to the citadel, and then all hope was relinquished by the besieged. Bheemsi and Pudmini were now in great distress, for they feared that the emperor when he entered the city would order the entire decimation of their house, and thus destroy the princedom of Mewar for ever.

The historian of the time, dwelling on this point, represents the Rana Bheemsi, after an arduous day,

stretched on his pallet, and during a night of watchful anxiety, pondering on the means by which he might preserve from the general destruction one at least of his twelve sons — when a voice broke on his solitude, exclaiming 'Myn bhooka ho' (I am hungry). Raising his eyes, the rana saw by the dim glare of a small lamp the majestic form of the guardian goddess of Cheetore. 'Art thou not satisfied, dread goddess,' muttered the prince, 'though eight thousand of my kith and kin were late an offering to thee?' 'No, not satisfied,' answered the spectre; 'I must have royal victims; and if twelve who wear the diadem bleed not for Cheetore, the land will pass from the line.'

The next morning the rana told his strange experience to his sorrowing wife, and that fair lady advised him to call a council of his chiefs and lay the matter before them. When the chiefs had heard the story they laughed, and treated the vision as the dream of a disordered fancy. But the rana commanded their attendance at midnight the following day, when again the goddess appeared and repeated the terms on which alone she would remain amongst them. 'Though thousands of barbarians,' she said, 'strew the earth, what are they to me? On each day enthrone a prince. Let the insignia of royalty proclaim his sovereignty, and for three days let his decrees be supreme, and on the fourth then let him meet the foe and his fate. Then only may I remain.'

When the matter was thus plainly made known, there arose a generous contention amongst the brave sons of

Bheemsi and Pudmini who should be the first victim to avert the threatened woes. The eldest son, Ursi, pleaded his priority of birth, which at length was acceded to, and thereupon he was proclaimed ruler. For three days he reigned supreme, and on the fourth he sallied out of the gates of the city and died fighting against the enemy. And each brother in turn followed that noble example, until all but the youngest of the rana's sons were slain.

When it came to the turn of the youngest, Bheemsi interposed his paternal authority and forbade the coronation. 'The youngest born,' he said, 'shall live, and shall bear our name. Now I devote myself to Cheetore.'

But another awful sacrifice was to precede the death of Bheemsi, and that was nothing less than the immolation of all the females in the city by the horrible rite called *Johur*. This was a strange heathenish custom practised by the Rajpoots to preserve their females from pollution or captivity. Not even the lovely Pudmini was to be spared, nor did she wish to be, as her lord would die the following day, and if she were left alone she must perforce become the slave of the hateful Emperor Ala-ud-din, who had so cruelly persecuted the house of Mewar.

Without delay men appointed for the task prepared all things for the *Johur*. An immense funeral-pyre was lighted in a great subterranean retreat in chambers impervious to the light of day, and when the signal was given, the defenders of Cheetore beheld their princesses, wives, and daughters, to the number of several

thousands, pass in procession through the streets, and enter the mouth of the cavern from which they would never more emerge.

Pudmini the fair, the beautiful, the unfortunate, the adored of her husband, and the idol of the people, was the last of the great crowd of martyrs, and she turned at the entrance of the subterranean chamber and waved a sad and yet proud adieu to her lord and to the assembled spectators. Then she disappeared, and the entrance was closed, and not even a sound was heard to indicate that any one of those ill-fated females shrank from the fiery death which was appointed them.

The next day the youngest son of Bheemsi and Pudmini, with a chosen band of associates, cut his way through the enemy's ranks and escaped to a place of safety, from which his descendants in after-days returned to win back their lost possessions.

And now Bheemsi, left alone, put on his saffron robe, the emblem of sacrifice, and calling around him his devoted clans, for whom life had no longer any charms, he threw open the portals and descended to the plains, and with a reckless despair carried death, and met it, in the crowded ranks of the infidels.

When Ala-ud-din entered the city of Cheetore thus dearly won, he took possession of an inanimate capital strewed over with the dead bodies of numbers of its brave defenders, and the smoke was still issuing from the recesses where lay consumed the once fair object of his love, the unfortunate Pudmini.

And since that sad day the cavern of the *Johur* at

Cheetore has been held sacred. No eye has penetrated its gloom, and superstition has placed at its mouth a huge serpent, which with its venomous breath for ever bars the way and guards the ashes of the dead from defilement.

VIII.

PRETAL, THE VILLAGE MAIDEN WHO BECAME A PRINCESS.

EARLY in the fifteenth century there was born in the village of Mudkul, in the south of India, a child who was named Pretal. She was the daughter of a Hindu farmer, and received the usual training of a poor girl whose lot would be to marry probably the son of a neighbour. But the unexpected was to happen in this case, and she who, if she had possessed the average beauty of a village maiden, would have mated with one of her own class, was, on account of her marvellous graces of person, to be the unfortunate cause of war between two great kingdoms, and eventually to adorn the zenana of a great prince.

For some years the fair Pretal was happy in her father's humble cottage, and was unknown beyond the boundaries of the village of Mudkul; but when she was just passing from girlhood into womanhood there came a serpent in the shape of a Brahmin, and instilled into her heart a sense of her surpassing loveliness, and ideas of worldly splendour which made the vain and foolish

maiden dissatisfied with her humble lot, and led her to sigh for other lovers than village swains.

The Brahmin who wrought this evil was the priest of a neighbouring temple, and he had just returned from a pilgrimage to the holy city of Benares, with his own head a little turned by the things he had seen and heard in the course of his travels. Eagerly did Pretal listen to the wonderful stories of the priest about handsome princes and fair ladies whose life was one long round of pleasure, and who were never called upon to do any drudgery, but had a host of servants to wait upon them and attend to their every wish. And all too readily was the flattering assertion believed that, if only some great prince could view the village beauty of Mudkul, her position and fate would be changed as if by magic. 'With charms such as yours,' said the wily priest, 'nothing is impossible.'

And after instructing the maiden to some extent in the mysteries of music and dancing, the holy man, who had not by his recent pilgrimage and washings in the sacred Ganges erased from his heart 'all the pomps and vanities of this wicked world,' left the village once more, with the deliberate intention of spreading the news far and wide of the loveliness of the maid of Mudkul.

The priest, it would appear, was not disinterested in his services, for as go-between in a good marriage he expected to be handsomely rewarded by all parties. In the course of time he arrived at the court of the Rajah of Beejanuggur, the richest and most powerful Hindu

prince in the south of India; and though, perhaps, without any real expectation of success in such a high quarter, he boldly declared himself to be the possessor of a jewel of great price in the form of a maiden 'more graceful than the nine wives of Krishna, and more lovely than the fabled houris of the Moslem paradise.' The bait took, and the account of the marvellous beauty of the fair Pretal so inflamed the heart of the rajah that without any more consideration or delay he decided to make the maiden his wife.

But when the Brahmin returned to Mudkul, even with so tempting an offer as the hand of the Rajah of Beejanuggur and the title of ranee, or princess, the maiden, who every day grew more assured of her own charms, met him, to his consternation, with a blank refusal. To be the wife of a rajah was well and good, said Pretal, but to be the wife of a great Mohammedan prince would be better; and she did not despair some day of securing such a prize.

So far the wishes or fancies of a village maiden, proud of her beauty, had been comparatively harmless, but now, unfortunately, events were to take a serious turn, and the fickleness as well as loveliness of the damsel was to lead to wars and to much bloodshed and cruelty.

The Rajah of Beejanuggur, irritated beyond measure at the rejection of his suit, and especially at the preference of the young lady for a Mohammedan rival, determined to invade the territory of his neighbour and abduct the offender—thus obtaining by force what he could not win in any other way. He selected for this delicate mission

one of his most renowned generals, and giving him command of five thousand troops, ordered him to march without delay to Mudkul and bring away *nolens volens* the wayward beauty and her family. The general set off on his mission, and in due time arrived at the village; but unfortunately no word had been sent to the simple farmer of the honour intended for his daughter Pretal, and when the hostile troops appeared, all the inhabitants of the place fled into the jungle. Thus was the general disappointed of his prize, and, as is so common under such circumstances, he and his soldiers vented their spleen on neighbouring villages, slaying young and old with the edge of the sword, and returned to Beejanuggur laden with every species of spoil but that for which they had invaded a neighbour's territory.

But the mischief did not end there. Indeed, those lawless acts were but the beginning of a great storm of war which was to rage throughout the Deccan and the south of India generally, and which was to cause a fearful loss of life and property.

The great rival houses, at the time of which we are writing, in the south were the houses of Beejanuggur and Kalberga. At the former reigned the Hindu rajah already referred to, and at the latter the Mohammedan King Ferose, surnamed Al Ghazee, or the Victorious. This was the golden age of Mohammedanism, and by many Ferose was regarded as the most splendid sovereign in India. And he was not only an able general, but a learned prince. From the days of youth he had been carefully trained in all the wisdom of the

East, and when he mounted the throne he became the patron of poetry, philosophy, and learning, and three days in the week gave lectures on botany, geometry, and logic.

But with all his virtues, the Sultan of Kalberga had many vices, and one of the most prominent was a craving for more wines and concubines than any other ruler on earth. Sir Edward Sullivan, commenting on this weakness, says: 'Ferose was the most splendid polygamist of history. He received into his harem in one day three hundred women, and despatched agents to all parts of the world to purchase slaves to replenish the vacancies caused by death or a change of taste. He built a harem at Ferozabad, on the banks of the Beemah, that was a city in itself. Here he secluded the most beautiful women of the known world; houris from Araby, Circassia, Georgia, Turkey, Russia, Europe, and China vied in voluptuous charms with the high-caste races of India; with each he conversed in her own tongue, and so equal was he in the distribution of his favours, that each lady of the zenana believed herself the most beloved of the sultan.'

It will easily be understood, therefore, that such a king as Ferose was not likely to pass unnoticed or unpunished such conduct as that of the Rajah of Beejanuggur. 'It was presumptuous,' he said, 'for a Hindu prince even to think of sending an offer of marriage to a village maiden in Mohammedan territory, and as for attempting to abduct the fair Pretal, it was an unpardonable sin.' So the order was given at once to

boot and saddle, and Ferose marched an army against the stronghold of Beejanuggur. The rajah, taken unawares, was ill-prepared for resistance, but he bravely met the foe; and though the sultan at first actually obtained possession of some streets of the Hindu capital, he was ere long compelled to retire before overpowering numbers. And now the war was carried on in the open country, and for four months fire and sword desolated the fairest portions of the land, and the Mohammedans made sixty thousand captives of both sexes.

The Rajah of Beejanuggur, at length, tired of the struggle, though yet far from being crushed, sued for peace, and it was granted on the conditions that he should bestow his fairest daughter in marriage on Ferose, and give her as a dower 'ten lakhs of pagodas, immense quantities of the pearls of Ceylon, fifty choice elephants, together with two thousand men and women, singers, dancers, and musicians.'

And now the sultan, on his return to Kalberga, gave the order to bring Pretal, the cause of so much blood-shed and the degradation of the royal race of Beejan-uggur, into the presence. When Ferose saw the maiden, even his critical experience was astounded at her excellence. He declared that all who had hitherto described her were in league with the father of lies to depreciate a beauty that far excelled anything he had ever seen or conceived of. The monarch went into raptures over her, and poured praise into her ears without stint, but with unwonted self-denial abstained from taking her into his harem. He was too old, he

said, for such beauty, but she should be made the first queen of his son Houssain, the heir to all his vast possessions.

Houssain was called and asked whether he was agreeable to such an arrangement, and the young prince, gazing upon the lovely maiden, took her to his heart and swore to be her slave for ever. So preparations were made for the marriage, which was celebrated amidst unequalled pomp and magnificence, Ferose himself actually giving the bride away. Thus the simple village girl by a singular train of circumstances became the grand lady, the wife of the heir to the throne of the richest and most splendid monarchy in India.

But though Pretal was now comfortably settled in life, having obtained all, and more than all, she had ever deemed possible, the evil influence of her beauty still remained active. The Rajah of Beejanuggur could not forget the slight she had put upon him in refusing his hand, and the actual marriage of the maiden to the son of his enemy was like adding fuel to fire. He chafed sorely under the sense of his wrongs, and secretly prepared for a day of retribution, which was not very long in coming.

Ferose was just as eager as the rajah for a renewal of hostilities, and was not sorry to learn that the Hindu prince was determined not to forget the affair of the quarrel about Pretal. And when two kings are longing for war, it does not take much to bring it about. An excuse was found, and once more the Hindus and Mohammedans of the South measured their strength, and

this time with a very different result. Ferose laid siege to the strong fortress of Bilkondah, which resisted all his might; then an epidemic set in and dispirited his army, and the Rajah of Beejanuggur arriving just then, and attacking the enemy with great vigour, the Mohammedan army was defeated and almost annihilated. This was the first great victory the Hindus had obtained over their hereditary foes, and never was revenge more sweet to an oppressed and insulted race. Far and wide villages were burnt and destroyed, mosques and holy places were defiled, and the haughty followers of Islam were made to drink deep of the cup of humiliation.

Ferose retired to his capital near the modern Hyderabad, and so much did the disgrace of defeat, after such a long series of victories, prey upon his mind, that he took to his bed and died after a reign of twenty-five years.

And now we look for the lovely Pretal to be raised to the height of human ambition as the consort of a reigning prince, but it was not to be. Houssain Khan, her husband, was a man of fierce temper and of weak mind, and the people generally disliked him. Taking advantage of this state of things, his uncle, Khan Kuanan, determined to seize the throne, which he speedily effected, as very little resistance was offered. The new ruler, a man of energy and daring, was withal of a kindly disposition; and instead of putting out the eyes or cutting off the head of his unfortunate nephew, which was the usual custom, he granted him permission to retire to Ferozabad with ample means and retinue,

and allowed him to hunt and divert himself within a limit of eight miles round his palace.

Pretal had to go with her lord, and at Ferozabad she remained for many years, not, we are told, unhappy, for she was a true and loving wife, but still somewhat disappointed that the crown of royalty which had been within her grasp should have been plucked so unexpectedly and rudely away.

IX.

PRINCESS KORUMDEVI.

KORUMDEVI was the daughter of Manik Rao, the chief of the Mohils, whose rule extended over fourteen hundred and forty villages. It was at Aureent that this young lady was born, and where her life was passed uneventfully for many years. But in the year 1407 A.D. her commonplace but happy existence was broken in upon by the arrival of a stranger at her father's court, whose manly form and martial fame completely won her heart.

The stranger was a desert chief named Sadoo, a man of wonderful physical strength, and of undaunted courage. He was the terror of the desert, carrying his raids even to the valley of the Indus, and on the East to Nagore. Manik Rao, of Aureent, had often heard of the exploits of this warrior, but had never seen him; so on one occasion, when Sadoo was returning to his desert home after a foray, with a train of captured camels and horses, the chief of the Mohils invited him to rest at Aureent and partake of its hospitality. And the invitation was accepted in the same frank spirit in which it was given.

Princess Korumdevi, as the only daughter of Manik Rao, was allowed pretty much to have her own way about the palace, and she always insisted upon looking after the comfort of her father's guests, partly for the honour of the house, and partly to see and to be seen. Sadoo speedily attracted her particular attention, and as she gazed upon his form and listened to his wonderful stories of adventures and hair-breadth escapes, she lost her heart to the gallant hero :

'She loved him for the dangers he had passed.'

There was nothing wrong in the maiden loving the stranger-knight under ordinary circumstances, but when we are told that Korumdevi had already plighted her troth to another prince, her conduct on the occasion of the visit of Sadoo was scarcely what it ought to have been, and was likely to lead to trouble in the future. Only a little while before, the Rahtore of Mundore had asked for the hand of Korumdevi, and the maiden, not dissatisfied with the person of the prince, and pleased with the idea of marrying into such a rich and famous house, had told her father to signify her consent. There was little or no love on the young lady's side at any rate, but still it was deemed a suitable match, and but for the coming to Aureent of the handsome and gallant Sadoo, the marriage would have been celebrated in due course, and the life of Korumdevi would have been quietly and usefully passed in the halls of Mundore.

Now, however, the course of her existence was to be changed, and nothing but unhappiness and misery were in

store for her and others who were associated with her by ties of relationship or friendship. The maiden was in love —it was love at first sight—and it was love that would not listen to reason, and that by the ardour of its passion would carry all before it. For a day or two after the arrival of Sadoo she restrained herself and kept her own counsel, but was dejected and moody, and went about her daily tasks in a dull and spiritless way.

Manik Rao, her father, was quick to notice the difference in the looks and conduct of Korumdevi, and calling her to his side, asked the reason, and then the flood-gates of love were opened and the truth was made known. Gently did the old man reason with her, and earnestly did he point out to her the disgrace of breaking her present vows, but the maiden would not hearken. All she could say was: 'I love! my father, I love this Sadoo with all my heart! I cannot marry the rahtore. I will marry the man I love!'

Next day the perplexed father revealed the truth to his guest, who, however, already suspected it, and to no slight degree reciprocated the feelings of the princess. But still Sadoo was willing to depart as he had come, if the maiden would be content; but if she would not, he would gladly make her his wife. Finally it was settled that the chief should return to his own city with the spoils of war that had been accumulated, and wait there to hear the decision of the fair Korumdevi.

And her determination was not long in reaching him. Nothing could change her resolve; she was in love, and love so often will not reason, and notwithstanding her

father's prayers the wilful damsel broke off the engagement with the Rahtore of Mundore, thus renouncing a throne to become the bride of a desert chief.

And in due time, the father becoming reconciled to the step, the nuptials were solemnized at Aureent. The dower was splendid: 'gems of high price, vessels of gold and silver, a golden bull, and a train of thirteen damsels of wisdom and penetration.'

But now let us see how the Rahtore of Mundore viewed the matter. A sensible man would have said, 'Let the lady go,' but the rahtore was of another mind. The marriage of Korumdevi with Sadoo he could not hinder, though he would gladly have done so; but he could attempt a bold revenge as the bride and bridegroom returned to the desert, and this he was resolved to do.

When he heard that the marriage festival was over, he gathered together four thousand of his bravest soldiers, and planted himself in the path which the chief and his lady would have to take. The father of the bride urged Sadoo to accept an escort of a few thousand Mohils; but he laughed and said that his own gallant band of seven hundred would be sufficient to scatter any foe they were likely to meet.

And merrily went the little party on its way, fearing no evil and suspecting no disaster. But sorrow lies near to joy, as they were soon to find out. At Choudun their way was blocked by the little army of the disappointed and aggrieved lover, and they saw if they would win their way home, they must fight. And as fighting is

as the breath of their nostrils to Rajpoots, no time was lost in coming to blows.

The rahtore, however, like a gallant foe, scorned the advantage of numbers, and a series of single combats ensued, with all the forms of chivalry. The first to enter the list was Jaytenga, of the kin of Sadoo. He rode gallantly forward, girt in armour, and felled a gigantic warrior of the other party to the ground. The fray thus begun, single combats and actions of equal parties followed, while the two princes stood looking on, expressing their approval of the bravery and skill of their followers.

At length it was felt that the parties most keenly concerned should enter the list and bring the fight to an issue. The gallant Sadoo therefore prepared himself for action, and mounting his steed, he twice charged the rahtore's ranks, carrying death on his lance; and after each effort the hero returned for the applause of his bride, who beheld the battle from her car. So the fighting continued until six hundred of the rahtore's men had fallen, and nearly half the little band of brave desert warriors had bitten the dust.

Determined to single out his rival, the Rahtore of Mundore, and either slay or be slain, Sadoo bade the lovely Korumdevi a tender farewell. And as he returned to the fray the high-souled lady exhorted him to the fight, saying, 'she would witness his deeds, and if he fell would follow him even in death.' And now the princes met, and after some seconds were lost in a courteous contention, each wishing to yield to his rival the first blow, it was at length struck by Sadoo on the

neck of the rahtore. With the rapidity of lightning it was returned, and Korumdevi from afar saw the steel descend on the head of her lover. Both princes fell prostrate to the earth, the rahtore in a swoon from loss of blood, but Sadoo in the agonies of death.

With the fall of the leaders the battle ceased, and there was great mourning over the slain. And now the fair cause of strife, the bereaved Korumdevi, drew near, and looking upon the face of her husband, loved him even in death, and said she would follow him wherever he had gone. Calling for a sword, she grasped it with one hand, then turning the sharp edge against her own body, she severed her left arm from the shoulder, and gave commandment that it should be conveyed to the father of her lord away in the fastnesses of the desert, with the message, 'Tell him such was his daughter.' Then the courageous lady ordered her attendants to strike off her right arm and carry it with her marriage jewels to the home of her childhood.

After these extraordinary actions Korumdevi prepared herself for the flames, and a funeral-pyre being erected on the field of battle, just where her lord had fallen, she gave herself up with him to the devouring element. Thus perished in the days of her youth the beautiful Korumdevi of Aureent, and her sad history has formed the engrossing topic around many thousands of watch-fires in Rajpootana from her own day even to this.

The Rahtore of Mundore did not long survive his rival. Six months after the contest his wounds opened afresh, and he passed quietly away.

X.

SOOJA BAE, PRINCESS OF BOONDI.

The Rajpoot city of Boondi was founded in the year 1342 A.D. by Rao Dewa, who took the Bandoo Valley from the Meenas, and styled the country Haravati.

The events dealt with in this story occurred at the beginning of the sixteenth century, when the princes of Boondi had consolidated their power and gained a name for determined force of character and great bravery.

Sooja Bae was the daughter of Narayandas of Boondi. Of this prince, Tod says in his 'Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan': 'He was one of those undaunted Rajpoots who are absolutely strangers to fear, and it might be said of danger and himself, "that they were brothers whelped the same day, and he the elder."' Unfortunately, however, these gallant qualities were rendered inert from the enormous quantity of opium he took, which would have killed most men. One pice or half-penny weight of opium is a common dose for an ordinary Rajpoot, and even this quantity would send the unitiated to eternal sleep, but Narayandas had become such a slave to the vice that 'he could at one time eat the

weight of seven pice' and feel very little the worse for it.

The mother of Sooja Bae was a daughter of the house of Cheetore, and the way in which Narayandas obtained his wife is worth relating. The houses of Boondi and Cheetore were friendly, and had come to some sort of agreement that in case of need one should go to the assistance of the other. In pursuance of this understanding, when one year Rana Reemull of Cheetore was attacked by the Pathans of Mandoo and sorely pressed, Narayandas set out at the head of five hundred select troops to the relief of the city.

On the first day's march the chieftain of Boondi lay down under a tree near a well to take a siesta after his usual strong dose of opium, and while he was in that condition, with his mouth wide open, a young wife of an oilman came to draw water at the well; and learning that this was Narayandas on his way to aid the Rana of Cheetore in his distress, she observed 'If he get no other aid than this, alas for my prince!' A common proverb in India is, 'An opium-eater has quick ears, though no eyes,' and the chief, though in the stupor of opium, roused himself and roared out, 'What is that you say, woman?' But the woman shrank back alarmed, and the offended prince, picking up an iron crowbar, advanced, not to strike her with it, but to take it and twist it round her neck until the ends met, as some evidence of his power. 'Wear this garland for me,' he said, 'until I return from aiding the rana, unless in the interim you can find someone strong enough to unbind it.'

Then Narayandas pushed on his way to Cheetore, and made straight with his five hundred men for the tent of the general of the besieging army, and, cutting all down before him, spread terror throughout the host, which fled in all directions. As the morning broke, the people of Cheetore had the satisfaction of seeing the invaders dispersed and their friend, the Prince of Boondi, at hand. He was received with open arms, and for some days there were gay doings in the city in honour of the late victory. The story of the exploit, of course, reached the ladies of the zenana, and a niece of the Rana of Cheetore vowed that she would have this warrior for her husband or die a maid. When the cavalier heard of the vow of the lady he was nothing loth to oblige her, and the rana giving his consent, the nuptials were celebrated with great pomp.

And the lady thus gained as wife was the mother of Sooja Bae, the princess whose short and tragic career we would now sketch.

In 1534 A.D. Narayandas died, and his only son, Rajah Sooja, ascended the *gadi*. Like his father, this prince was athletic in form and dauntless in soul, and, it is said, possessed in an eminent degree that unerring sign of a hero, long arms 'reaching far below his knees.'

Rajah Sooja, to keep up the old friendship with Cheetore, espoused a daughter of Rana Rutna, a new prince of that house. And in return Sooja Bae was given in marriage to Rana Rutna. In her new home Sooja Bae was happy, for being not only of a comely form, but also of a cheerful disposition, she gained the heart of her husband.

But the happiness of the princess was fated to be of but short duration, for through an act of indiscretion, rather than of wickedness, she stirred up strife between her husband and brother which ended in the death of the two princes.

One day Sooja Bae, when her brother was on a visit to Cheetore, prepared a repast to which she invited both her loved ones. And not only did the lady attend to the culinary process herself, but she waited on the princes at table, to keep the flies away from the food, and to see that they had everything that they desired. Unhappily, on removing the dishes, the princess remarked, partly in fun and partly in earnest, that 'her brother had devoured his share like a tiger, while her husband had played with his like a child.' This was a little matter to lead to a quarrel between two men, especially kinsmen, but Rajpoot honour is so thin-skinned that the veriest trifle will wound it and set a nation in a blaze.

Rana Rutna, when he heard the observation of his wife, looked at her in indignation, and then glanced at his brother-in-law in anger. The latter pooh-poohed the saying, and thought the best thing they could do would be to regard it as unsaid, for he was sure that his sister intended nothing disrespectful by it. The rana then professed to be reconciled, but in his heart there was still bitterness; and though he dissembled his feelings and treated his guest with kindness during the remainder of his stay, he was vowing all the time that he would be revenged—ay, and that nothing less than the life of his

brother-in-law would atone for the insult he had received.

Sooja Bae, the innocent cause of this trouble, retired to her apartments in great grief, for knowing well the fierce disposition and revengeful character of her husband, she feared for the future. However, as her brother departed after a season in safety, and her husband being as kind and attentive as of yore, she began to take heart and to hope that the seed of discord that had been sown would not bear fruit.

But Rana Rutna was only biding his time to take a full revenge, and this he determined to do, no matter what trouble was brought thereby upon his kindred or his country. Nothing is more unreasoning or selfish than anger, and when a Rajpoot is angry about his wounded honour he is 'as cruel as the grave.'

And the enraged prince set about his revenge in a systematic and despicable way. When the merry Spring months came round, he sent word to his brother-in-law that he was coming to see him, to hunt with him on the Spring festival in the preserves of Boondi; and Rao Sooja, thinking no evil, sent a message of welcome. 'The scene chosen for the sport was on the heights of Nandta, not far from the western bank of the Chumbul, in whose glades every species of game, from the lordly lion to the timid hare, abounded. The troops were formed into lines, advancing through the jungles with the customary noise and clamour, and driving before them a promiscuous herd of tenants of the forest—lions, tigers, hyenas, bears, every species of deer, from the

enormous *bara-singa* and nilgae to the delicate antelope, with jackals, foxes, hares, and the little wild-dog. In such an animated scene as this, the Rajpoot forgets even his opium; he requires no exhilaration beyond the stimulus before him, a species of petty war, not altogether free from danger.'

And it was in the midst of the confusion of this hunting expedition that the dastard Rana of Cheetore resolved to gratify his hatred by taking the life of his brother-in-law. The two princes, as was customary, were placed in proximity to each other in convenient stations where they could securely assail the game as it passed, each having two or three confidential servants at his side, the rest being scattered about the woods. When there were very few of their followers in sight, Rana Rutna said to a confidant, 'Now is the moment to slay the boar!' and instantly at the signal an arrow was sped at Rao Sooja. 'With an eagle's eye,' however, that prince saw it coming, and turned it off with his bow. Still he had no suspicion of foul-play, thinking that it was an accident; but when another arrow was aimed at him his eyes were opened.

Scarcely had the prince warded off the second arrow, when the rana darted at him on horseback, and cut him down with his sword. The rao fell, and was insensible for a moment, but recovering himself, took his shawl and tightly bound up the wound, and as his foe was making off he called after him in tones of defiance. The rana, seeing that his brother-in-law was still alive, turned back, saying that 'the work was but half done,'

and like a coward that he was, once more attempted to stab the wounded man.

But now came the turn of Rao Sooja. As the arm of the rana was raised to finish the deed of shame, it was seized in a dying grasp, and the assassin was dragged from his steed. Together the brothers fell to the ground, the rana underneath. Rao Sooja knelt upon the breast of his foe, and with one hand grasped his victim by the throat, while with the other he searched for his dagger. The dagger found, it was plunged into the heart of Rana Rutna, who died without a groan. And then Rao Sooja himself fell back and expired.

The awful news was carried like the wind to Boondi and to Cheetore, and there was weeping and wailing in the two princely houses. It was so unlooked for, and so dreadful, that men held their breath when they heard of it, and women fainted away. And the lady to feel it most deeply, was Sooja Bae, the wife of the one prince and the sister of the other; and her grief was the more poignant because she remembered that but for her thoughtless words at a certain never-to-be-forgotten repast there might have been no quarrel and no feud between the two men.

And now one sad event was to be followed by another. Sooja Bae had no desire to live, and announced that she would become a *sati*. Rao Sooja's wife said she also would not survive her husband. So on the fatal field of sport two funeral-pyres were prepared, and the broken-hearted ladies laid down their lives that they might at once rejoin their lords in 'the mansions of the sun.'

Tod says that over the place where the warriors fell cenotaphs were reared to commemorate their sad story, and one also was erected in honour of the ill-fated Sooja Bae; but the latter stands 'on a pinnacle of the pass, and adds to the picturesque beauty of that romantic valley, which possesses a double charm for the traveller, who may have taste to admire the scene, and patience to listen to the story of the Princess of Boondi.'

XI.

TARA BAE, THE WIFE OF PRITHWI RAJ.

In the Valley of Oodipore, the most diversified and romantic spot in India, near the city of Komulmur, there may be seen a simple monumental shrine, overlooking the road leading to Marwar. This shrine consists of a dome of very moderate dimensions, supported by columns, and underneath it repose the ashes of the Troubadour of Mewar, the gallant Prithwi Raj, and his heroine wife, Tara Bae, whose lives and exploits fill many a page of the romances of the Rajpoots.

Tara Bae, whose name means 'star,' was the daughter of Rae Soortan, a chieftain of Bedore. 'He was of the Solanki tribe, the lineal descendant of the famed Balhara kings of Anhulwarea. Thence expelled by the arms of Alla in the thirteenth century, they migrated to Central India, and obtained possession of Tonk-Thoda and its lands on the Bunas.' Rae Soortan, however, had been deprived of Thoda by the powerful Afghan named Silla, and being thus forced to leave the home of his fathers, he moved to, and settled at Bedore, at the foot of the Aravali, within the bounds of Mewar.

Tara Bae was born in those disastrous times for her house, very early in the sixteenth century, and as she grew in years she listened eagerly to her father's stories of his defeats, and often wished that she were a boy instead of a girl, that she might buckle on armour and go forth sword in hand to help her parent to win back his lost city and estates. Nothing is mentioned in the annals of the time of the mother of Tara Bae, so that we may suppose she died when her baby was born, or very soon after. And if this be the case, we can account to a great extent for the little girl being brought up more as a son than a daughter.

Her father, it is evident, was proud of the spirit of his child, and encouraged her to engage in all kinds of boyish sports, and had her trained in the use of the bow and the spear, as well as in the more feminine occupations of the house. And the outdoor exercise agreed with the maiden, and she grew up into a strong and beautiful woman. When turned fourteen years of age, scorning the habiliments and occupations of her sex, she dressed pretty much like her father's cavaliers, learned to guide the war-horse, and to throw with unerring aim the arrow from his back even while at full speed.

More than once Rae Soortan had sought to recover his lost city of Thoda from the Afghans, but had invariably failed in his attempts, but now that his daughter was equal to the dangers and hardships of a campaign, he determined to make one more trial of strength and skill. Armed with a bow and quiver, and mounted on

the back of a fiery Kettyawar, the daring damsel joined the cavalcade, and went with credit through the little war, which ended, however, like the preceding, in failure and disaster. With diminished forces and dejected spirits, Rae Soortan and Tara Bae returned to Bedore. But still they did not altogether lose heart, and hoped for a turn of fortune in the immediate future, and with that thought in view bent their energies towards gathering fresh troops.

The loveliness and bravery of such a lady as Tara Bae could not be hidden under a bushel, and soon from far-distant regions suitors came to claim her hand. Amongst the rest was Jeimal, the third son of Rana Raemul, of Mewar, a brave but headstrong prince. To the proposal of this prince Tara Bae gave the decided answer, 'Redeem the city of Thoda, and my hand is thine.' He assented to the terms, but made no sign of gathering troops for the enterprise, and lingered about the palace at Bedore. And one day evincing a rude determination to enter the presence of the fair lady, and possess the prize ere he had earned it, the indignant father slew him at the threshold.

An act like this was, as a rule, amongst the Rajpoots more than sufficient to create a family feud and a devastating war, but the Rana of Mewar seems to have had greater control over his spirit than the majority of his ancestors, and when he heard of the death of his son, and was incited to revenge, he replied with a magnanimity which deserves to be recorded, 'that he who had thus dared to insult the honour of a

father, and that father in distress, richly merited his fate.'

But what one brother failed to do for Tara Bae, another undertook to perform, on condition that the maiden became his wife. The name of this new candidate was Prithwi Raj, one of the most famous names in Rajpootana.

And here we might turn aside for a moment to refer to Jeimal, Prithwi Raj, and Sanga, who were the sons of Rana Raemul of Mewar. They were all three strong, brave youths, and might have been the comfort of their father and the support of Mewar but for their mad jealousy of one another. And their jealousy was deepened by a singular episode in their lives.

The three brothers with their uncle Soorajmul were one day discussing the grave question who should ascend the *gadi* at their father's death, when Prithwi Raj exclaimed that he thought fate intended that honour for him. The others said 'No! No!' and one suggested that without delay they should all repair to the priestess of Charuni Devi, a temple about ten miles east of Oodipore, and ask her to reveal their future fortunes.

In due time they arrived at the abode of the priestess. 'Prithwi Raj and Jeimal entered first and seated themselves on a pallet, Sanga followed and took possession of the panther-hide of the prophetess, his uncle Soorajmul with one knee resting thereon. Scarcely had Prithwi Raj disclosed their errand, when the sibyl pointed to the panther-hide as the decisive omen of

sovereignty to Sanga, with a portion to his uncle.' Instead of being satisfied with the decision of this court of appeal to which they had all come, no sooner had the prophetess spoken than Prithwi Raj drew his sword and would have falsified the omen by slaying his brother Sanga. Soorajmul fortunately saw what his nephew intended, and stepped forward in time to save Sanga's life, but he was himself severely wounded, and succeeded in wounding Prithwi Raj in his turn. Sanga then fled with five sword-cuts on his body and an arrow in his eye, which spoiled the sight for ever. Jeimal galloped after the fugitive with intent to finish what Prithwi Raj had commenced, but Sanga escaped and lived in hiding for many years, and finally, as we shall see, came to the throne, as the priestess had prophesied.

Jeimal, as already related, lost his life when seeking the hand of Tara Bae. Prithwi Raj recovered from his wounds received that day of the quarrel at the temple, and now we find he also is resolved to pay court to the beauty of Bedore. And being more honourable than his brother, he is more likely to succeed.

When Prithwi Raj arrived at Bedore, Tara Bae made the same answer to his request that she had made previously to his brother, viz.: 'Redeem the city of Thoda, and my hand is thine.' And the lady spoke from her heart this time, for the fame of her suitor was in everyone's mouth, and he was a handsome man to look upon, and very gentle with ladies. He was a man she could respect and love, and when he said, 'I will restore Thoda, or I am no true Rajpoot,' she was proud and pleased,

for she believed he could and would do what he promised.

The time of the Mohammedan festival of the Mohurrum, which is in commemoration of the martyrdom of Hossain and Hassain, the sons of Ali, was chosen for the exploit. The conquerors of Thoda, it will be remembered, were Afghans, and as such stout Mussulmans. Prithwi Raj formed a select band of five hundred cavaliers, and accompanied by his affianced bride, who insisted on partaking both of his glory and his danger, he reached the city at the moment the bier containing the effigies of the martyr-brothers was placed in the centre of the square.

Prithwi Raj, Tara Bae, and one other, an inseparable companion of the prince, left their cavalcade and joined the Mohammedan procession as it passed under the balcony of the palace in which the Afghan chief was putting on his dress preparatory to descending. Just as the chief had asked some of his retainers, who were the strange horsemen that had joined the throng, the lance of Prithwi Raj struck him, and an arrow from the bow of Tara Bae stretched him on the floor in the throes of death. Before the crowd recovered from the panic caused by this deed the three had turned to rejoin their troops. But now an elephant blocked the way, and if Tara Bae had not struck at it with her scimitar and made it fly, it would have fared ill with them.

Immediately Prithwi Raj was in the midst of his brave followers, he called them to attack the city, and all fighting like heroes, the Afghan garrison fled,

and those who did not fly were cut to pieces. Then was there great rejoicing on the part of the citizens at the return of their former prince and his daughter; and when Prithwi Raj led the old chieftain forward and inducted him into his inheritance, the shouts of gladness could be heard by the departing Afghans at a vast distance from the city, as they rapidly sped to seek a place of refuge.

The marriage of Tara Bae and Prithwi Raj was not delayed. Everyone felt that the bridegroom had well earned the bride, and the latter joyfully joined her fortune with one whom she dearly loved, and who had proved himself so well able to care for her and hers. For some months after the marriage the lovers stayed at Thoda, happy in one another's society, and happy in helping Rao Soortan to arrange the affairs of his recovered kingdom.

But when all was quiet at Thoda, both Prithwi Raj and Tara Bae panted for fresh sights and for new exploits. So they set off for the court of Mewar to see how things were going on there. Prithwi Raj found his father well, but in trouble. Soorajmul, the uncle already referred to, whom the prophetess had said should obtain a share of the kingdom, was persuading himself that the sibyl meant the whole of the kingdom, and he was plunging deep into treason to obtain it. And the plots had just come to a head as Prithwi Raj and his bride returned.

Obtaining the aid of the Sultan of Malwa and others, Soorajmul set up the standard of rebellion and marched

quickly against Rana Raemul. The latter, with the few troops he was able to gather together at short notice, gave the rebels battle, but seemed likely to be defeated when Prithwi Raj and Tara Bae rode up with one thousand fresh horse to the rescue and turned the tide of victory to the side of the rana. Tara Bae did wonders that day, and was the admired of all beholders, and men found it difficult to believe that the strong arm which sent them reeling from the saddle was that of a lady; but they had only to look at her beautiful face and figure to have their doubts removed. And some say that the gallant dame killed as many with her bright piercing eyes as she did with her sword. No one seemed to be able to stand before her, and with arrows and lances flying all around, she bore a charmed life. Doubtless some chivalrous knights spared her when they might have cut her down, but, still, her safety in a great measure was due to her activity and her prowess.

After the battle there occurred a strange interview between the rebel uncle and his nephew, Prithwi Raj. Tod, speaking of it, says that 'the meeting was unique in the details of strife, perhaps since the origin of war.' Soorajmul had been badly wounded in the fight, and the wounds had been inflicted by his nephew; but when Prithwi Raj went in the late hours of the night to the encampment of the enemy and entered the tent of his uncle, the latter rose up to meet him with the customary marks of respect, as if nothing unusual had occurred during the day, or since they had last conversed some months before.

'Well, uncle, how are your wounds?' was the greeting of Prithwi Raj. And the reply was, 'Quite healed, my child, since I have the pleasure of seeing you,' and yet at that very moment they were bleeding afresh from the exertion of rising. Then the nephew exclaimed, 'I am very hungry, uncle; have you anything to eat?' Dinner was served, and the extraordinary pair sat down and ate off the same brass platter, which amongst Rajpoots was the highest mark of confidence and friendship. And after dinner, when about to withdraw, Prithwi Raj did not hesitate to eat the 'pan' presented on taking his leave, although he knew that not unfrequently it was used as a medium for administering poison. The last words that passed between the two were, 'You and I will end our battle in the morning, uncle.' 'Very well, child; come early.'

And on the morrow there was more hard fighting, in which Tara Bae again took part, with the result that Soorajmul fled with a few followers, and after hair-breadth escapes reached the wilds of Khanthul, where he halted and subdued the aboriginal tribes. And there he built the stronghold of Deola and became lord of a thousand villages, which have descended to his offspring, who now enjoy them under British protection.

Tara Bae and Prithwi Raj, after these exciting events, settled down for a period of quiet home happiness at their residence of Komulmur. But after a time they again went forth seeking adventures, and they found so many that time and space would fail us if we attempted to record one-half of them. 'Their fame

increased in Rajwarra; one thousand Rajpoots, animated by the same love of glory and devotion, gathered round them. Their swords shone in the heavens and were dreaded on the earth, but they aided the defenceless.'

It could scarcely be expected that an adventurous prince like Prithwi Raj would be long-lived, but his brilliant career was to be cut short sooner than was expected, and with him, as we shall see, died his beloved and faithful wife. The closing scene was on a piece with former reckless and chivalrous behaviour.

A letter came to Prithwi Raj from his sister, who had married a Sirohi prince, complaining in sad terms of the barbarous treatment of her lord, from whose tyranny she begged to be delivered, and to be restored to the paternal roof, since whenever he indulged too freely in the 'essence of the flower,' *i.e.*, in opium, he used to place her under the bedstead and leave her to sleep on the floor. When Prithwi Raj had read this letter, he handed it to his wife and asked her opinion, and the answer he received was what he expected, 'Let us go at once and punish the prince and bring our relative away.'

But on this expedition, in which his own sister was concerned, Prithwi Raj preferred to go alone, and though Tara Bae begged to go with him, having a presentiment of coming evil, he persisted in his resolution and went forth without a companion of either sex. At midnight he reached Sirohi, scaled the palace, and interrupted the repose of Pabhoo Rao, the defaulting husband, by placing a dagger at his throat. The frightened man, a coward at heart, as every wife-beater is, prayed for mercy, and

his wife, notwithstanding his cruelty, joined in the humiliating appeal. The prayer was granted on condition of the husband standing as a suppliant with his wife's shoes on his head and touching her feet, the lowest mark of degradation. He obeyed, was forgiven, and was embraced by the brother and sister, and once more there was peace at Sirohi.

But Pabhoo Rao was not the man to forgive such an insult, and though he dissembled outwardly, he was meditating in his heart the death of his guest. Too cowardly to attack his brother-in-law openly, he compassed his death by poison. At parting, after a few days, he presented Prithwi Raj with a confection of which all Indians are fond, and for which Pabhoo Rao was celebrated. In his innocency Prithwi Raj partook of it as he came in sight of his home at Komulmur, but so deadly was its influence that he was only able to stagger as far as the shrine of Mama Devi and send word for his beloved Tara, when he fell down dead.

Terrible was the grief of the widowed lady when she saw the lifeless body of her lord, and great was her anger against Pabhoo Rao. But her grief was more overpowering than her anger, and unable to bear existence without her gallant husband, she sank down at his side in true womanly devotion, and sobbed as if her heart would break. 'My husband, oh, my husband!' was her wailing cry. Nothing more could she say, but those simple words showed the depth of her sorrow. And they were her last words as she ascended the funeral-pyre to join her lord.

XII.

QUEEN KURNARATH.

KURNARATH was one of the six or seven wives of Rana Sanga, who on the death of his brothers Jeimal and Prithwi Raj, and the demise of his father, Rana Raemul, ascended the throne of Mewar. For many years Sanga had been in banishment on account of the rivalry and jealousy of his brothers, and adversity had brought out the best qualities of the prince, so that when he became ruler of the state he was strong and self-reliant, master of himself and of the situation.

Under this prince Mewar reached the summit of her prosperity, and was known and feared far and wide. But after a long and prosperous reign Sanga's sun went down in darkness. The Tartars, under Baber, attacked his dominions, and though again and again they were defeated, treason at length favoured their cause, and Rana Sanga's diminished army was forced to flee.

The prince retreated towards the hills of Mewar, and announced his fixed determination never to re-enter his capital, Cheetore, but with victory. Had his life been spared, he might have redeemed the pledge, but treason

followed him even in exile, for some of his ministers gave him poison in his food, and thus brought to a close a career of strange experiences, of very great hardships, and of no little good to his race and country.

'Rana Sanga was of the middle stature, but of great muscular strength; fair in complexion, with unusually large eyes, which appear to be peculiar to his descendants. He exhibited at his death but the fragments of a warrior: one eye was lost in the broil with his brother Prithwi Raj, an arm in an action with the Lodi King of Delhi, and he was a cripple owing to a limb being broken by a cannon-ball, while he counted eighty wounds from the sword or the lance on various parts of his body. A cenotaph long marked the spot where the fire consumed the remains of this celebrated prince.'

Queen Kurnarath was the youngest of the queens of Rana Sanga, but the most beautiful and the best beloved. And the love she received she returned, for though her husband was not, owing to his numerous wounds and disfigurements, what could be called a handsome man, he was bold, brave, true, and tender-hearted. Kurnarath loved him for his renown, loved him for the very wounds which spoke of his knightly deeds, and loved him because he was a kind and indulgent husband.

But her wedded life was short, all too short for the loving lady. Scarcely were the wedding ceremonies over, when her husband met his unexpected defeat, and his life was brought by his own ministers, upon whom he had bestowed many favours, to an untimely end.

A few months after the death of the rana, Queen Kurnarath bore a child, who was named Oody Singh, and this child, after almost as adventurous a youthful career as his father, was to become ruler of Mewar.

Immediately, however, on the death of Sanga, Rutna, a son by one of the other wives, ascended the *gadi;* and like his father, he determined to make the field his capital, and commanded that the gates of Cheetore should be left wide open, boasting that 'its portals were Delhi and Mandoo.' After five years of government this prince also came to a violent end.

Then Bikramajeet, another son of Sanga, became the ruler of Mewar, but he was insolent, passionate, and vindictive, and utterly regardless of that respect which his proud nobles rigidly exacted. Trouble followed as a consequence both at home and abroad. His nobles despised him, and on more than one occasion refused to obey his orders, and the prince had no power to enforce his commands.

Oody Singh, the child of Queen Kurnarath, was at that time about six years old, and the thoughts of many were turned towards him, and some proposed that he should be exalted to the *gadi*, and the queen made regent. Others opposed the scheme, however, as the rule of minors was generally disastrous amongst the Rajpoots.

While these things were being discussed, an event happened which gave everyone something to do, and led to great changes at Mewar. Bahadoor, Sultan of Guzerat, being informed of the divisions amongst the

Rajpoots, determined to take advantage of them and revenge the disgrace of the defeat and captivity of his predecessor Mozuffer. Reinforced by the troops of Mandoo, he marched against Bikramajeet, who was encamped in Boondi territory, and though the rana defended himself bravely, he could not stand against the foe, as many of his own soldiers deserted him in the hour of need.

The deserters marched straight for Cheetore, and declared that they had come to defend the young Prince Oody and his mother, Queen Kurnarath, from their enemies. And though Kurnarath upbraided them for deserting their lawful reigning prince, she was glad of their aid in the defence of the capital, which the Sultan of Guzerat had declared his intention to capture.

'There is a sanctity in the very name of Cheetore,' says Tod in his 'Rajasthan,' and truly it seemed to be the case at the time of which we are writing, for as soon as it was known that the city was in danger Rajpoots from the farthest corners of the desert flocked to its defence. And perhaps the fact that the beautiful Queen Kurnarath called for their aid had also something to do with influencing the decision of the chiefs and warriors. In a very little time Cheetore had a gallant band of defenders, enough, under ordinary circumstances, to have held the city against all assailants.

The Sultan of Guzerat had brought with him, however, a very large army, and in addition to the usual battering-rams or catapults he had some field guns, worked by European artillerists. This is the first notice

in Indian history of the application of such guns in sieges, and it was mainly owing to these new and novel munitions of war that the sultan was successful in the storm of Cheetore.

For many months the city held out, the Rajpoot warriors being incited to wonderful deeds of valour by the presence and encouraging words of their queen, who was the very life and soul of the defence, attending the deliberations of the chiefs, and even at times going forth clad in armour to show herself on the walls and at every point of danger.

But notwithstanding the heroic defence made, the besiegers gained ground, and when a mine was sprung at the 'Buka rock,' which blew up forty-five cubits of the ramparts, the defenders of Cheetore began to fear for the fate of their city.

But at this juncture Queen Kurnarath suggested an expedient which it was hoped would bring them relief even at the eleventh hour. She urged the princes, chiefs, and warriors to rally all their forces and continue the defence a little longer, and she would at once send off an express to Humayon, the Emperor of Delhi, with her rakhi or bracelet, praying for his aid.

To understand the full force of this act we must call to mind one of the most interesting of the customs of the Rajpoots. From time immemorial there has existed amongst these races a chivalrous institution known by the name of the 'Festival of the Bracelet.' With regard to this, Tod says:

'The festival of the bracelet is in spring, and whatever

its origin it is one of the few when an intercourse of gallantry of the most delicate nature is established between the fair sex and the cavaliers of Rajasthan. The Rajpoot dame bestows with the rakhi the title of adopted brother, and while its acceptance secures to her all the protection of a *cavaliere servante*, scandal itself never suggests any other tie to his devotion. He may hazard his life in her cause and yet never receive a smile in reward; for he cannot even see the fair object, who, as brother of her adoption, has constituted him her defender. But there is a charm in the mystery of such connection, never endangered by close observation, and the loyal to the fair may well attach a value to the public recognition of being the Rakhi-bund Bae, "the Bracelet-bound brother" of a princess.

'The intrinsic value of such pledge is never looked to, nor is it requisite it should be costly, though it varies with the means and rank of the donor, and may be of flock, silk, and spangles, or gold chains and gems. The acceptance of the pledge and its return is by the *katchli* or corset, of simple silk or satin or gold brocade and pearls. In shape or application there is nothing similar in Europe, and as defending the most delicate part of the structure of the fair, it is peculiarly appropriate as an emblem of devotion. A whole province has often accompanied the corset.'

The Emperor Humayon when he received the bracelet of Queen Kurnarath was in Bengal waging war against rebellious vassals; but he was so pleased with the present, and so charmed with the request, that

he accepted the title of adopted brother of Kurnarath and protector to her infant, Oody Singh, and pledged himself to her service, 'even if the demand were the castle of Rinthumbor,' the most cherished stronghold of the emperors of Hindustan.

Before Humayon could reach Cheetore, however, though he abandoned his conquest in Bengal to redeem his pledge, the city had fallen. Long and nobly had the besieged defended themselves, but the enemy was too vigorous for them. Point after point of advantage had been captured, and there was no resource before the garrison but surrender or death. And surrender they would not, preferring death rather than what they counted dishonour.

Again* recourse was had to the expedient of crowning a king as a sacrifice to the dignity of the protecting goddess of Cheetore. Bagh-ji, Prince of Deola, courted the insignia of destruction, and was publicly proclaimed prince. 'The banner of Mewar floated over him, and the golden sun from its sable field never shone more refulgent than when the *change* was raised amidst the shouts of her defenders over the head of the son of Soorajmul.'

Those preparations of course meant that the inhabitants of Cheetore with but few exceptions must die, the women by the *Johur*† and the men by the swords of their enemies. An exception was made of the

* See, for the previous instance, 'The Life of Pudmini of Cheetore,' p. 105.

† See p. 105.

queen's son Oody Singh, whose life it was desirable to save for the future leadership of the nation. The lad was placed in safety, after a heart-rending good-bye from his mother, with Soortan, Prince of Boondi. The garrison put on their saffron robes, the symbols of sacrifice, while materials for the *Johur* were preparing.

There was little time for elaborate preparations, for a fresh breach had been made in the walls, and the enemy was pouring into the city. Combustibles were quickly heaped up in reservoirs, and magazines excavated in the rocks, under which gunpowder was strewed, and now the sad sight was witnessed of thirteen thousand females marching to their doom. Queen Kurnarath the beautiful, the brave, and the good, led the procession, and exhorted her maidens and the wives and daughters of the citizens to be of good cheer, for it was better to die by the hands of their brethren than to become the slaves and mistresses of their enemies. Thus with calmness and dignity, and thinking more of others than herself, the queen went to the sacrifice.

Immediately the awful tragedy of slaying thirteen thousand females was completed, the gates of the city were thrown open, and Deola, the temporary rana, at the head of his soldiers, rushed with a blind and impotent despair on his fate. He and all that were with him fell beneath the swords of the besieging army.

When the Sultan of Guzerat entered the city, he was appalled at the sights which met his gaze. All around lay the mangled bodies of the slain, while some were just in the last agonies from the poniard or poison,

awaiting death as less dreadful than dishonour and captivity.

Though Humayon was too late to save the life of Queen Kurnarath, he was in time to avenge her death. He expelled the foe from Cheetore, and utterly defeated the forces of the sultan, who fled to the sea-coast, and took ship to the Island of Din. And long did the emperor mourn the death of the beautiful lady who by the present of the bracelet had constituted him her true knight and the defender of her child.

XIII.

THE EMPRESS NOOR JEHAN, THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD.

Noor Jehan, the story of whose romantic and eventful life we now sketch, was one of the most beautiful and wonderful women the world has known. During twenty years she ruled the Sultan Jehangir and his mighty empire of Hindustan with power as absolute as was ever exercised by Semiramis or Cleopatra over the kingdoms of Assyria or Egypt.

'In all ages of the world women have attracted and repelled, been adored and oppressed; men have by turns been their tyrants and their slaves, ennobled or debased by their influence. If we examine the histories of the greatest men, or seek the real causes of many of the most startling changes that have taken place in the conduct of the world's affairs, we shall find that the influence of women has been the most powerful agency, incessantly at work, often invisibly, and giving only occasional evidence of its existence by some striking eccentricity in the revolving orbit of human events. The history of the two sexes shows that their power

and influence have been fairly balanced, and that whatever humiliation women may as a race have occasionally suffered from men, has been more than counterbalanced by the supremacy they have individually exercised. This was the case with Noor Jehan, the light of the world.'*

The early history of this fair lady was as wonderful as her after-life. Her father was Chaja Aiass, a native of Western Tartary, who left his own country to push his fortune in Hindustan. He was descended from an ancient and noble family fallen into decay by various revolutions of fortune. But though unable to bestow money upon Chaja Aiass, his parents gave him that which was better than money—a liberal education both of the mind and affections. When quite a youth he fell in love with a beautiful maiden as poor as himself, and married her, and it was to provide for his young wife that he turned his thoughts to India, the usual resource of the needy Tartars of the north.

When Chaja Aiass set forth on his foreign travels, his possessions consisted of an old horse and a very small sum of money which he had realized from the sale of his other effects. His wife, who was soon to have a baby, was placed upon the horse, while the young adventurer walked by her side. For a time all went well, but the journey was longer than they expected and the expense more serious, and when their scanty pittance of money was expended they were reduced to great straits. For some days they subsisted upon charity, but when they arrived at the skirts of the great solitudes which

* Sir Edward Sullivan.

separated Tartary from India there was no house to cover them from the inclemency of the weather, and no hand to relieve their wants. To return at this stage was certain misery, while to proceed was apparent destruction.

The brave couple plunged into the desert, and there to complete their misfortunes the wife of Aiass was prematurely confined of a daughter, the heroine of our story. For some hours the distressed ones remained where their child was born, with a vain hope that travellers might pass that way and give them relief. They were disappointed, however, for human feet seldom tread those deserts. The sun declined, darkness gathered quickly around, and the roaring of wild beasts could be heard in the distance. Fearing to spend the night where they were, Chaja Aiass placed his wife on the horse. Now the child was lifted up, but the mother could not carry the little one; she could not even hold herself fast on the horse. And the father was so exhausted that he could scarcely stand. A long contest ensued between humanity and necessity, in which the latter prevailed, and it was agreed that the child should be left on the highway. The infant, partly covered with leaves for warmth was placed under a tree, and the disconsolate parents proceeded in tears.

But the little girl was not thus to perish. When the parents had advanced about a mile from the place and the eyes of the mother could no longer distinguish the solitary tree under which they had left their daughter she gave way to grief, and throwing herself from the

horse on the ground, sobbed forth the heart-broken cry, 'My child! my child!' She endeavoured to raise herself with the intention of returning to her offspring, but she fell back in a swoon. When she came round, her husband soothed her as best he could, and, weak and ill as he was, promised to go back for the infant.

When Aiass arrived at the place where they had left their child, and his eyes rested upon her, he was almost struck dead with horror. A black snake was coiled around the baby, and seemed to be extending his fatal jaws to devour it. The father rushed forward, and the serpent, alarmed at his vociferation, retired into a hollow tree. With great thankfulness he gathered up the girl unhurt, and hurried with her as fast as his weakness would allow to the mother. The husband and wife talked over the remarkable escape of their daughter from death, and felt in their hearts and said to one another that evidently there was a great future before their child, that she whom God had thus miraculously preserved was intended for some high position of honour and usefulness. Little, however, did they think how high their daughter was to rise in after-days; little did they imagine that she was destined to be Empress of India, and one of the most remarkable women of the world.

From the moment of the return of their child the circumstances of Aiass and his wife improved. The unexpected came to pass. Some other travellers appeared on the scene and relieved their wants, and helped them on their way to Lahore, where at that time the Emperor Akbar kept his court.

Aiass had a distant relative amongst the emperor's retainers, a man of great power and influence, and by this friend his fortunes were pushed. We shall not follow his career step by step, as our story lies more with the life and doings of his daughter. Suffice it to tell that in a little time he became known to the emperor, and for his diligence and ability was raised to the command of a thousand horse. Then he was advanced to the position of master of the household, and his genius being as great as his good fortune, he was finally raised to the office and title of Actmad-ul-Dowla, or high treasurer of the empire. Thus he who had almost perished through want in the desert became in the space of a few years the first subject in India.

Soon after their arrival at Lahore the little girl who had undergone such wonderful adventures in the desert received the name of Mher-ul-Nissa, the sun of women, on account of her beauty. And as she grew into a sweet maiden of fifteen summers, she showed that she well deserved the flattering appellation, for in beauty she excelled all the ladies of the East. And her mind, too, was educated with the utmost care. In music, in dancing, in poetry, in painting, she had no equal among her sex. From her mother she inherited the graces of her person, and from her father the graces of her mind. 'So brilliant a jewel, even in the homely setting of poverty, could never have escaped attention; but assisted by all the costly splendour belonging to the daughter of the first subject in the kingdom, it was irresistible.'

Many famous courtiers and warriors, hearing of the beauty of the 'sun of women,' desired her hand, and Aiass, her father, chose for her one whom he esteemed and loved for his valour and goodness of heart. This suitor was Shere Afgan, a young Persian, lord of a vast jaghire in Bengal, and the most powerful and accomplished noble of the court of Akbar.

Knowing little, if anything, of her father's wishes, however, and having wishes and desires of her own, Mher-ul-Nissa was aspiring to the love of Selim, the young heir to the throne, who became afterwards the Emperor Jehangir. The impression of the ambitious maiden was that Selim had but to see her to yield instant homage to the majesty of her charms, and she waited with confidence for the moment when fortune would favour her. The opportunity was not long wanting. The prince-royal one day visited her father, and stayed late. When the public entertainment was over, and all, except the principal guests, had withdrawn, and wine was brought on the table, the ladies, according to custom, were introduced in their veils. Now was the time for the 'sun of women' to prove her powers. 'She sang—Selim was in raptures; she danced—he could hardly be restrained in his place. Her stature, her shape, her gait had raised his ideas of her beauty to the highest pitch. When his eyes seemed to devour her, she, as by accident, dropped her veil, and shone upon him at once with all her charms. The confusion which she could well feign on the occasion heightened the beauty of her face. Her timid eye by stealth fell upon the prince, and kindled all

his soul into love. He was silent for the remaining part of the evening, while she endeavoured to confirm by her wit the conquest which the charms of her person had made.'

Little did Mher-ul-Nissa know what trouble she was bringing upon herself and others by her ambition and her luring arts. She had captivated Prince Selim, it is true, and eventually when he became emperor she was married to him. The immediate outcome, however, of her passion for the prince, and his passion for her, was to hasten the day of her marriage with another. When Aiass, her father, came to know of the feelings of Prince Selim, and the wishes of his daughter, he made known the fact that he had already given away his daughter's hand to Shere Afgan, the Persian, and that the betrothal must stand. Mher-ul-Nissa pouted and cried, and sought to change the decision of her father, but all in vain; and Selim fared no better with his father, Akbar. The latter, after listening to the passionate prayer of his son to interfere on his behalf, sternly refused to commit a piece of injustice, though in favour of the heir of his throne. The prince retired abashed, and the maiden, making a virtue of necessity, and not very unwilling either, for she greatly admired the nobleman her father had chosen for her, was married to Shere Afgan.

Shere Afgan, however, suffered in his prospects for life for not having made a voluntary resignation of the 'sun of women' to the enamoured prince. Though Selim durst make no open attack upon his fortunate rival during the lifetime of Akbar, yet he was able to influence

court feeling against him and make his life unhappy. Disgusted at length, Shere Afgan left the emperor's court, and taking his lovely lady with him, retired to the province of Bengal and obtained from the subahdar of that country the superintendency of the district of Burdwan. There till the death of Akbar he remained, and seems to have been happy in his married life, for the 'sun of women' was proud of her handsome and affectionate husband, who was counted the bravest and most accomplished man of his day. There are some who say that all this time Mher-ul-Nissa was in communication with her former princely lover, Selim, and was aware of and sympathized with his designs on her husband's life, but there is no proof of these charges. Our own opinion is that the fair lady, though not forgetting her princely lover, was entirely faithful to her spouse, and made him a good and affectionate wife. And a tie to bind them more closely together was a fair daughter, their only child, born to them a few years after their union.

In 1605 A.D. Akbar died, and his son Selim ascended the throne, assuming the high-sounding title of Jehangir, or 'conqueror of the world.' In order that he might have a favourable omen, it is said, he placed the crown on his brow at the instant the sun rose above the horizon. For forty days and nights the new emperor kept high festival at Agra with a magnificence seldom paralleled, even in the annals of Oriental magnificence. When those scenes of festivity and splendour were over, however, Jehangir seems at once to have turned his thoughts towards the love of his youth, and the passion

for Mher-ul-Nissa, which he had repressed from respect for and fear of his father, he now allowed to return with redoubled violence. As absolute master of Hindustan, he thought he had a right to the 'sun of women,' even though she was the wife of another, and he sent an express to Shere Afgan in Bengal, commanding him to the presence without delay and to bring his wife with him. That nobleman appeared and was received in open durbar at Delhi with apparent cordiality, and new honours were conferred upon him.

Shere Afgan, naturally open and generous, did not at first suspect the emperor's intentions, thinking that time and other beauties had erased the memory of Mher-ul-Nissa from Jehangir's mind. But he was gradually to be undeceived. The monarch was firmly resolved to remove his rival, and to possess the lady whom he had ever placed first in his affections, and whom he had never given up the hope of winning. The means that he used to gain his ends were, as was to be feared, ungenerous and disgraceful.

The first attempt was to remove his rival by placing him in the post of danger in a tiger-hunt. News was brought that a tiger of extraordinary size was discovered in the forest of Nidarbari. This savage beast had carried off many of the largest oxen from the neighbouring villages, and had taken more than one human life. In chase of the man-eater the emperor set off, attended by Shere Afgan and all his principal officers. Having, according to the custom of the time, surrounded the ground for many miles, they began to move towards

the centre on all sides, and at last the tiger was roused, and his roaring was heard in all quarters, and the royal party stopped.

The nobility being assembled, Jehangir called aloud, 'Who among you will advance singly and attack this tiger.' At length three omrahs started from the circle and fell at the emperor's feet and begged permission to try singly their strength against the formidable animal. And now, as the emperor had expected, the pride of Shere Afgan arose, and, afraid of losing his former renown, he exclaimed, 'To attack an animal with weapons is both unmanly and unfair. God has given to man limbs and sinews, as well as to tigers; and he has added reason to the former to conduct his strength.' The other omrahs objected in vain that 'All men were inferior to the tiger in strength, and that he could be overcome only with steel,' for Shere Afgan replied, 'I will convince you of your mistake'; and throwing down his sword and shield, he prepared to advance unarmed.

Jehangir, pleased with a proposal full of danger to his rival, though for a minute or two he made a show of dissuading him from the enterprise, at length gave his consent. The princes and noblemen present looked on with amazement, knowing not whether they ought most to admire the courage of their comrade or to exclaim against the folly of his deed. The desperate fight commenced by the warrior stepping forth and seizing hold of the tiger, and after a long and fearful struggle the man prevailed over the beast and laid it dead at the emperor's feet. Mangled with wounds, Shere Afgan was

carried off the field to his palace, and there, under the gentle treatment of his wife, whose love for him grew with his devotion to her and prowess on her behalf, he recovered his health and strength. The thousands who were eye-witnesses of the deed of daring carried the news of the exploit everywhere, and the fame of the gallant nobleman was increased, while the emperor was humiliated by the failure of his designs.

But the determination of Jehangir to obtain the lovely Mher-ul-Nissa for his bride only grew stronger with disappointment and chagrin, and another vile plot was hatched to compass the death of her husband. Shere Afgan had scarcely recovered from his wounds when he went to pay his respects at court. He was caressed by the emperor, and he suspected no guile. A snare, however, was prepared for him. Jehangir had given private orders to the rider of one of his largest and strongest elephants to waylay Shere Afgan in one of the narrow streets of the city, and there as if by accident to tread him to death.

As the brave nobleman was being carried in his palanquin, he saw the elephant in his way, and shouted to his servants to carry him back so that the road might be cleared. The men, however, instead of obeying his commands, became frightened, and threw the palanquin with their master down in the street and fled. Rising quickly to his feet, Shere Afgan drew a sharp sword which always hung by his side, and with this he struck the elephant across the root of the trunk, which he cut off with one blow. The animal roared with pain, turned

from him, fell down, and expired. The emperor, who was in a position to see the whole episode, retired with amazement and shame; and when this much-sinned-against nobleman, in the simplicity of his heart, related the story to him afterwards, he praised his strength and valour, while he hated him all the more for his wonderful escape.

Though Shere Afgan was too generous and trustful to suspect the emperor of such wicked machinations against his life, Mher-ul-Nissa saw through the evil designs of Jehangir, and urged her husband to return to his estates in Bengal, believing that there they would be comparatively safe from the malice of their foe. For six months they were not disturbed, and the lovely cause of all this trouble began to cherish the hope that the emperor had either conquered his passion for her, or felt remorse for his behaviour towards her husband.

The Governor of Bengal was a foster-brother of Jehangir, and through this man, Cuttub, the emperor after a time resumed his hostility to Shere Afgan. Cuttub hired forty ruffians to attack and murder Shere Afgan when an opportunity should offer. Taking advantage of the absence of the nobleman's servants one night, these men entered his sleeping apartment and stole silently up to him in the dark. They were about to plunge their daggers into his body, when one of them, who was an old man, being touched with remorse, cried out with a loud voice, 'Hold! have we not the emperor's orders! Let us behave like men. Shall forty fall upon one, and that one asleep?' 'Boldly spoken,'

said Shere Afgan, starting that instant from his bed. Quickly seizing his sword, he placed himself in one corner of the room and waited for the attack of his assassins. In a few minutes he had disarmed or slain more than half of them, and the rest, except the old man who had warned him, fled in terror. Shere Afgan took his benefactor, for so he considered him, by the hand, and having inquired about those who had devised the dastardly attack, he dismissed him with handsome presents to make the particulars known. And so famous did the nobleman become after this gallant exploit, that he could not stir abroad for the mob that pressed upon him.

Shere Afgan now withdrew with his wife from the capital of Bengal to his old residence at Burdwan, and hoped to live there in obscurity and safety. But it was a vain hope. The Governor of Bengal followed him in a little while, apparently to pay him a friendly visit. The unfortunate nobleman, hearing of the approach of the head of the principality, mounted his horse and with only two servants went to meet him outside the city as a mark of respect. The meeting was cordial on both sides, to all appearance. After a little talk, however, the governor ordered his elephant of state to be brought, which he proceeded to mount. While this was being done, Shere Afgan stood respectfully by, until suddenly made aware of coming danger by one of the pikemen striking his horse, pretending that it was in the way of Cuttub, the governor. Swords were at once drawn, and Shere, seeing the need of prompt action to save his life,

spurred his horse up to the elephant on which the governor sat, and having broken down the *ambhary*, or castle, cut him in two; and thus the unscrupulous Cuttub became the victim of his own zeal to please the emperor.

And now Shere Afgan turned round on the rest of his foes, and after a short sharp struggle four great noblemen fell by his hand. The remaining chiefs were at once astonished and frightened, and fled to a distance and formed a circle round their redoubtable antagonist. 'Some began to gall him with arrows, others to fire with their muskets.' His horse at length being shot with a ball in the forehead, fell under him. Reduced to the last extremity, Shere Afgan began to upbraid his murderers with cowardice. He invited them severally to single combat, but in vain. Thereupon giving up all hope of life, he turned his face towards Mecca; and taking up some dust with his hand, for want of water, threw it by way of ablution upon his head. He then stood up seemingly unconcerned. Six balls entered his body before he fell, and even then his enemies had scarcely courage to go near till they were sure he was dead. The Eastern chronicler of these events remarks, 'They praised his valour to the skies, but in adding to his reputation, they took away from their own.'

Thus was Shere Afgan done to death! Thus perished one of the kindest-hearted and the bravest men that ever lived! And a woman, a beautiful woman, the 'sun of women,' was the cause of it all.

And how did Mher-ul-Nissa, the young widow, bear the loss of her gallant husband? Opinions differ, but for our part we incline to the views of those historians who describe her sorrow as deep and passionate. But she was allowed little time for thought after the sad deed, for the officer who succeeded the deceased governor hastened to the house of Shere Afgan, afraid that the fair lady, in the first paroxysms of grief, might make away with herself. And having captured the great prize, no time was lost in conveying her to her former lover, the Emperor Jehangir, whose court was at Delhi.

And now a strange thing occurred. Mher-ul-Nissa was treated with harshness and neglect, being confined to the worst apartments of the palace, and restricted to the smallest yearly allowance permitted by the laws of the zenana. For nearly six years Jehangir and Mher-ul-Nissa did not see each other's face.

Some historians say that the emperor was so grieved at the tidings of the death of Cuttub, his foster-brother, whom he had ever found an affectionate, faithful, and devoted servant, that he made a vow that he would never more see the lady who had been, though unconsciously, the cause of his favourite's death. Knowing the passion of Jehangir, however, for the lady in question, and remembering the dark deeds he had committed to possess her, we do not think even the loss of Cuttub would have been allowed to stand in the way of the speedy fulfilment of his wishes, if no other obstacle had presented itself.

We are inclined to the belief that Mher-ul-Nissa

herself was the cause of the six years' separation. She was so high-spirited that it is not impossible that she rejected all overtures from one whom she looked on as the murderer of her husband. Mountstuart Elphinstone thinks that her repugnance to Jehangir directly after the death of Shere Afgan was so strongly displayed as to disgust that monarch, who placed her among the attendants on his mother, and appeared to dismiss her from his thoughts.

In the seclusion of the zenana, Mher-ul-Nissa, whose name was now changed to Noor Mahal, the 'light of the harem,' occupied herself with attention to home duties and to needlework, in which she excelled. Like most Indian women, she had a fine touch. And Indian women have the finest touch in the world. 'They wind the raw silk from the pod; each pod is divided into twenty degrees of fineness, and so exquisite is the touch of these women, that whilst the thread is running through their fingers so swiftly that the eye can be of no assistance, they will break it off at each change from the first to the twentieth, and from the nineteenth to the second.' As in beauty, so in skill in the occupations of her sex, Noor Mahal surpassed all the ladies of her age, and soon nothing was fashionable in the court at Delhi but the work of the 'light of the harem.' And by the sale of her work she accumulated much money, with which she repaired and beautified her apartments, and clothed her handmaidens in the richest tissues and brocades. Noor Mahal herself, however, affected plain and simple attire.

At length, Jehangir, attracted by the hourly-repeated tales of the beauty, accomplishments, and wit of his early love, determined to visit her unexpectedly in her apartments; and there he found everything so elegant and magnificent that he was struck with amazement. But the greatest ornament of all was Noor Mahal, who was half reclining on an embroidered couch, in a plain muslin dress which became her better than all the richest brocades of Bagdad or the finest embroideries of Cashmere. Her maids sat in a circle round her, plying their tasks, attired in garments of the richest material. The 'light of the harem' rose in evident confusion, for she had had no warning of the visit, and had not been face to face with Jehangir for many years. She received the emperor with the ceremony of touching first the ground and then her forehead with her right hand. But she spoke not a work, opining that in some circumstances silence is more eloquent than speech. Jehangir, who was overcome by her marvellous beauty—for the years that had passed had but added to the charms of the fair lady—was also unable to speak for some minutes.

Recovering himself, he sat down on the couch and required Noor Mahal to be seated by him. The first question he asked her was scarcely a lover's. 'Why this difference,' he said, 'between the appearance of Noor Mahal and her slaves?' And the clever woman answered, 'Those born to servitude must dress as it shall please those they serve; these are my servants, and I alleviate their burden of bondage by every indulgence in

my power. But I that am your slave, O emperor of the world, must dress according to your pleasure, and not my own.' Evidently time and retirement had softened the feelings of Noor Mahal towards Jehangir, and she was ready to forget the enmity which had led to her late husband's death.

As the emperor talked to the lovely woman his old passion for her returned, and he clasped her in his arms, and begged forgiveness for his long neglect and harshness. Throwing round the neck of Noor Mahal a necklace containing forty pearls, each worth £4,000, he whispered to her that she should be proclaimed empress of the world. Without delay she was moved from the humblest apartments of the zenana to those of the sultana, and her marriage was celebrated with the utmost pomp. And now her name was changed from the 'light of the harem' to Noor Jehan, the 'light of the world.' As a special mark of favour, the gold coin of the realm was stamped with the name of Noor Jehan in this inscription, 'Gold has acquired a hundred degrees of excellence in receiving the name of Noor Jehan.'

The power of the new empress was cemented and established by the rise of her wise old father, who was made prime vizier, and by the advancement of her brother, Asiph Khan, to the position of first omrah at court. Shah Jehan, the emperor's favourite son, married a daughter of Asiph Khan; and Prince Sherier, another son, married Noor Jehan's own daughter by Shere Afgan. Thus fortune smiled upon the family, which not

very many years before had nearly perished in the desert from want.

From the first of their married life, and for nearly twenty years, Noor Jehan ruled her husband and the realm of Hindustan, and on the whole wisely. There was no appointment made in the state of the most trifling nature without her interest, and no treaty concluded without her consent. And her magnificence was beyond all bounds. In his memoirs Jehangir, speaking with pride of the character and deeds of his wife, says: 'In the whole empire there is scarely a city in which the princess has not left some lofty structure, some spacious garden, as a splendid monument of her taste and magnificence.' And Noor Jehan's talents were exercised in matters proper to her sex, as well as in state affairs. The splendour of the emperor's court was increased by her taste, and the expense was diminished by her good management. 'She contrived improvements in the furniture of apartments, introduced female dresses more becoming than any in use before her time, and it is a question in India whether to her or her mother we owe the invention of attar of roses.'

For some years all went happily and prosperously; but at length the vexed question of who should be heir to the throne led to strife—not between the imperial couple, for they seem to have been attached to one another to the end, but between the sons of Jehangir. Shah Jehan was generally considered to be the most likely prince to succeed his father; but some were in favour of Sherier, who had married the daughter of

Noor Jehan. Shah Jehan broke out into open rebellion, but in the struggle that ensued he was defeated, and then forgiven.

But no sooner was the trouble caused by Shah Jehan settled for the time, than strife arose with a powerful subject of the state, in which Noor Jehan played a prominent and courageous part. The new offender was Mohabit Khan, the most successful general of the day, who had only to raise his standard—whether for the defence of the throne, or to further his own ambitious views—to collect at once an army of tried warriors around him. Whether justly or unjustly, this chief was charged with oppression and embezzlement during the time of his governorship of Bengal, and he was summoned to court to answer for his conduct. He at first made excuses for not attending, but finding that his appearance was insisted on, he set out on his journey accompanied by a body of five thousand Rajpoots, whom he had contrived to attach to his service.

Within a short distance of the camp of Jehangir, who was just preparing for a march to Cabul, Mohabit despatched his son-in-law to explain the disputed matter, fearing to put in an appearance himself until he saw the humour of the emperor. He was soon made aware of the high feeling against him, for his messenger was stripped and bastinadoed and sent back to him disgraced. Mohabit displayed no outward sign of anger, but in his heart he vowed to be revenged for this insult. And next day he had the opportunity.

The emperor was encamped with his troops on the

Jhelum, and early in the morning the main body of the army crossed the river by a bridge for the next camping-ground, leaving the imperial camp to follow later in the day. No sooner did Mohabit perceive the separation of the emperor from his troops, than he advanced at once to the bridge and set fire to it, and then pressed on to the imperial tent, and, entering Jehangir's presence, explained to him that his act was one of necessity to save his life. He then placed the emperor on an elephant and took him to his own camp, assuring him of his safety, and adding significantly, 'And I also am determined to be safe.'

Meanwhile Noor Jehan, who was in the women's apartments, did not lose her presence of mind. She heard all that passed, and conceived the idea that if she could only get across the river to the army she might bring the soldiers back and rescue the emperor. Immediately putting on a disguise and slipping out, she got into an ordinary palanquin, and was erelong safe in the midst of the royal troops. Sending for her brother and the principal chiefs, she bitterly reproached them with their neglect in allowing their sovereign to be made a prisoner before their eyes. And she did not confine herself to talk, but made immediate preparations to rescue her husband by force. During the night she directed a nobleman named Fidar Khan to swim the river with a small body of horse and make a dash for the tent where Jehangir was confined; but the daring scheme failed.

Next morning the whole army was commanded to

advance to the rescue. It was headed by Noor Jehan herself, who appeared on the howdah of a high elephant, with a bow and four quivers of arrows. The bridge having been destroyed, the only way to cross was by a ford lower down the river. It was a narrow shoal between deep water, and full of dangerous holes, so that the passage was a trying one. Many were obliged to swim, and all landed with their powder wet, weighed down with their drenched clothes and armour, and were compelled to engage in hand-to-hand conflict with the foe ere they could effect a landing.

Noor Jehan was amongst the first to cross with her brother and some of the principal officers, and against the empress the most furious assault was directed by Mohabit and his Rajpoots. But though balls and arrows fell thick round her howdah the brave lady quailed not. Not for a moment did she waver, and she encouraged her panic-stricken troops to the battle, and with killing effect poured the contents of her quivers of arrows upon her foes.

At length, however, the driver of her elephant was shot, a grandchild who was seated in her lap was wounded with an arrow, and her elephant received a cut on the proboscis, which made him dash back into the river and make for the further side. Then the struggle was over, for the craven-hearted troops, apparently not able to fight without their empress, fled in terror and dismay.

Though Mohabit sought to capture Noor Jehan immediately after her defeat, he was disappointed, for the

clever and active lady escaped to Lahore. There, however, she received letters from the emperor, which he had been compelled to write, saying that matters were now amicably arranged, and urging her to join him. Suspecting nothing, she immediately set out for that purpose, and when within a short distance of the camp she was met by a strong body of Rajpoots, who conducted her a prisoner to the presence of Mohabit and the emperor.

Mohabit, who attributed all his troubles to the influence of Noor Jehan, sought to compass her death. He charged her before Jehangir of treason, and of conspiring to place on the throne her stepson Sherier. And after enlarging on these matters he concluded by demanding the public punishment of the offender. 'You, who are the Emperor of the Moguls,' said the nobleman, 'whom we regard as something more than human, ought to follow the example of God, who is no respecter of persons.'

And Jehangir, with a baseness of mind that cannot be too severely condemned, signed a warrant for the instant execution of his beautiful and brave wife. Even now the courage of Noor Jehan did not desert her, but seemed to rise with danger, and she heard her doom without emotion. Her only request was that she might see her husband before she died. 'Imprisoned sovereigns,' she said, 'lose their right to life with their freedom; but permit me once more to see the emperor, and to bathe with my tears the hand that has fixed the seal to the warrant of my death.'

Mohabit acquiesced, and the emperor and the empress

met once more. Noor Jehan uttered not a word, but the tender melancholy of her demeanour affected Jehangir even to tears, and, turning to their captor, he exclaimed in pathetic tones, 'Will you not spare this woman, Mohabit? You see how she weeps.' The chivalrous nobleman relented and answered, 'The Emperor of the Moguls should never ask in vain.' Thereupon at a sign the guards retired, and Noor Jehan was restored to liberty.

For many months the imperial couple, though nominally at liberty, were not allowed to leave the camp of Mohabit, and the strange sight was seen of a subject taking with him in his train wherever he went his liege lord. But this state of things could not go on for ever, and Mohabit at length, having humbled the emperor sufficiently, resigned his power.

Immediately Jehangir was out of the clutches of his foe, he listened to the prayers of Noor Jehan and declared Mohabit a traitor, and set a price upon his head. The bitter hate of the empress was tempered, however, by the cooler wisdom of her brother, who, knowing the value of Mohabit's military skill, persuaded the emperor to pardon him, and entrust to him the command of the army in the Deccan. Thus did the strange episode conclude; the proud subject coming off victorious in a long struggle with his emperor and empress.

For a few more years Noor Jehan was the ornament of the imperial court, and the adviser and support of her husband in all his arduous state duties. The influence,

which she exerted was very marvellous. Her power was felt in every corner of the vast Indian Empire. But with the death of Jehangir, in 1628, her reign came to an end.

'The great queen Noor Jehan,' says Sir Edward Sullivan, 'survived her husband eighteen years; £250,000 a year was annually paid to her out of the public treasury; her power, however, entirely ceased at Jehangir's death; from that day she never wore any colour but white; she was too proud to speak even of public affairs, and she gave up her mind to study, retirement and ease. Scorning to counsel where she had once dictated, she retired altogether from the affairs of state, and amongst the gardens and palaces of the royal residence at Lahore she passed the luxurious evening of a life of glory and vicissitude, that reminds us of the last days of the magnificent Queen of Palmyra in her royal retreat near Tibur.'

XIV.

MUMTAZA ZEMANI, THE CONSORT OF SHAH JEHAN.

Mumtaza Zemani, the 'most exalted of the age,' was the niece of Noor Mahal, the 'light of the world.' She was the daughter of Asiph Khan, the brother of Noor Mahal, and in her mind and person she had much of the exquisite beauty and fascination of her aunt.

Mumtaza Zemani, when she first came under the notice of Shah Jehan, was the wife of Jemal Khan, a prominent nobleman at the court of Jehangir. At that time she was called Arjemund Banu, and the praises of her beauty were in everyone's mouth.

The meeting of Mumtaza Zemani, or Arjemund Banu, with Shah Jehan, which was to change the whole course of her life, was under extraordinary and romantic circumstances. To explain the incident, we must refer to a strange custom of the Moguls, which was subversive of all the Eastern rules of female seclusion. 'On the Noroze, or festival held on the ninth day of the new year, was celebrated a kind of carnival in the king's seraglio, in the palace of the Moguls. At this fancy

fair the ladies kept the stalls and sold whatever they chose, such as fine purple and gold, rich embroideries of the new fashion, ribbons, and cloth of gold, cloth worn by ladies, and all other merchandise. By this means the budding beauties of the court were brought under the king's notice. The great feature of the fair was the marketing of the king, who came in person to bargain, and haggled with the she-merchants of his court, driving them down; asserting that things were too dear, that he would not be imposed upon, and that the merchandise of others was much better. The women, on the other hand, ignored the kingly rank, and ran up the value of their goods, insisting upon a higher price, often coming to high words; and telling him that he knew nothing about it, and that he had better go about his business.'*

The fun at these fancy fairs often ran fast and furious, and sometimes they were the cause of much after-misery and trouble. There is a story told of the Emperor Akbar, who at one of these fairs was once in peril of his life, from a noble-minded and spirited woman, who, instead of listening to his tale of love, presented a dagger at his breast, and would have slain him if an attendant had not promptly interfered.

It was at a gathering of the kind we have described, in the imperial palace at Delhi, that Shah Jehan and Mumtaza Zemani first met. The Emperor Jehangir the father of Shah Jehan, had desired all the ladies to provide precious stones, and the noblemen were commanded to purchase at whatever price the ladies asked.

* Sir Edward Sullivan.

Mumtaza Zemani had been requested by her husband Jemal Khan to take charge of a stall, and so attractive was the fair lady both in person and manners, that she drew a large circle of friends, and speedily parted with her precious stones for a fabulous sum.

It was when she had disposed of her stock-in-trade, that the prince Shah Jehan drew near to her booth, and, seeing the beautiful lady, advanced to her side, and asked her what she had to sell. With the quick-wittedness of woman she promptly answered that she only possessed one large diamond, and that its price was very high. The prince desired to see it, and the fair one showed him a piece of fine transparent sugar-candy of a tolerably good diamond figure. With a pleasant air she demanded a lakh of rupees, £12,500, for the worthless article; and the prince instantly complied with her request, and paid over the money.

This transaction led to further conversation, and Shah Jehan found that the wit of Mumtaza Zemani was as exquisite as her beauty. But, alas! the same could not be said of her modesty and womanly reserve. The prince invited her at the close of the fair to his palace, and instead of answering his request with the indignation and spirit of the lady who was in a similar way tempted by Akbar, she weakly consented, flattered by the attentions of the heir-apparent.

When the husband of Mumtaza Zemani heard of her fall, and when she returned to his abode, he refused to see her face. Thereupon the lady made complaint to her lover, and Shah Jehan, with princely vehemence,

ordered Jemal Khan to the elephant garden, there to be trodden to death. Before the stern sentence was attempted to be carried into effect, however, the luckless husband of the frail Mumtaza Zemani requested permission to speak to the offended prince. Being graciously allowed the favour, he proceeded to explain, in a despicable spirit of unmanliness, that his coldness to his wife, far from being designed as an insult to the heir-apparent, was intended as the highest possible compliment. The craven-hearted but much-sinned-against man declared that he was not angry with his lady for her favourable reception of the royal advances, but that he felt himself unworthy to receive back to his house one who had gained the affections of Shah Jehan. The prince was delighted with the turn affairs were taking, gave Jemal Khan a royal suit with the command of five thousand horse, and relieved him of his domestic difficulty by taking his wife away from him.

The whole incident is a wretched one, and we are glad to turn away from it, and regard Mumtaza Zemani in the nobler character which she assumed when she was made Empress of India. When Shah Jehan ascended the throne, his marriage was solemnized with great pomp, and his consort proved a faithful and devoted lady throughout the fourteen years of their married life. She had not, perhaps, the strength of will or the commanding talents of her aunt, Noor Jehan, and did not exert as great a political influence; but in the palace and the emperor's household she was greatly beloved for her kindness of disposition and goodness of heart.

Her praises were sung by all, and her conduct in every respect warranted the deep and lasting affection of Shah Jehan. Mumtaza Zemani seems to have been a most lovable woman, and had a wonderful power of influencing and controlling human hearts.

Many children were born to the royal couple, and it was at length in childbirth that the 'most exalted of the age' died. She had forebodings of a fatal termination to her illness, and calling her sorrowing husband to her side, she said: 'I am about to die. I cannot doubt it. But before I quit this life I have two requests to make to you. Promise me that you will never marry again, that no more of your children may dispute with mine your love and your riches; swear to me, moreover, that you will raise over my remains a tomb that will render my name immortal.' Shah Jehan solemnly promised all that was asked, and Mumtaza Zemani went peacefully the way of all mankind. The mourning for the departed lady was very great, the emperor sending forth an exceeding bitter cry of anguish for the wife of his youth, whose beauty and winsome ways had ever held his heart captive, and had cheered many sad and solitary hours.

Shah Jehan, to his honour be it recorded, kept to the letter the last requests of her whom he had loved so well. He took no other wife to his palace; he did not even desire another:

> 'Of slaves he had many, of wives but one.
> There is but one God for the soul, he said,
> And but one moon for the sun.'

Shah Jehan may be quoted with wonder as that almost

imaginary being of Mohammedan history, the husband of but one wife.

When the poignancy of his grief had somewhat abated, the emperor set himself to the sad and yet pleasant task of erecting a tomb that would render the name of his adored Mumtaza Zemani ever famous. And how well he succeeded history relates, and we ourselves can see at the present day. On the banks of the river Jumna at Agra there arose the famous Taj Mahal, the most costly tomb that ever covered mortal clay. 'To this day may be seen, sharp and beautiful, as if chiselled but yesterday, the marble walls and priceless mosaics, and lofty minarets and polished dome, of the "queen of edifices," reposing amid luxuriant gardens, marble fountains, and waving cypresses, and affording a precious proof of the affection and magnificence of the Emperor of Hindustan, and of the worth and influence of his beautiful wife, Mumtaza Zemani.'

We might here close our story of Mumtaza Zemani, but many would feel that it was incomplete unless a pretty full description of the tomb in which she was buried was given. And this we therefore now give. From the almost innumerable accounts that have been written of the wonderful Taj Mahal, we choose extracts from one by Miss C. F. Gordon Cumming; and we have been guided in our choice partly by the fact that the writer is a lady, and our book is about ladies, and partly by the conviction that Miss Cumming's description is the most accurate and beautiful.

'Of all the lovely things in creation,' Miss Cumming

writes, 'whether of nature or of art, none has ever conveyed to my mind the exquisite delight of that fairy-like, snowy palace among tombs—the Taj Mahal. In olden days, the Eastern poet, Sadi, complained that his friends could not sympathize with his wearisome praises of his love; he said that, could they but once behold her beauty, they might understand his song, which must seem but as an idle tale to those whose minds had not been steeped in the same sweet influences. So it is with the loveliness of this fairy architecture. A cluster of pearly, snow-white domes, nestling round one grand central dome, like a gigantic pearl: these crowning a building, all of purest, highly-polished marble, so perfect in its proportion, so lovely in its design, so simply restful to the eye, and withal so amazingly intricate in its simplicity, that it is, in truth, more like some strange dream in marble than like a work of human hands. Its four sides being precisely similar, it follows that, from whatever side you behold it, its perfect form never varies. Far from the city or from any other building, it stands alone in its transcendent loveliness, having its own rich Eastern garden on one side, while the warm red sandstone wall, above which it is raised, is washed by the blue waters of the sacred Jumna.

'This pearl among tombs was built by the Mohammedan Emperor, Shah Jehan, in memory of the love of his youth, his idolized Taj Mahal, the "crown of the seraglio." The most exquisitely refined work is here lavished with unsparing profusion, the walls, both within and without, being enriched with inscriptions in

Arabic, engraved and inlaid in marble, and with the loveliest decorative designs of floral arabesques. To Agra, as to the Temple of Solomon, were brought together all manner of precious stones, "Onyx stones and stones to set, glistening stones and stones of diverse colours, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance." The marble stones were brought all the way from Jeypore, or Ajmere, but the red sandstone was found in the neighbouring Mewal Hills. It is said that twenty thousand men were employed for upwards of seventeen years on the building, which cost somewhere about three millions English money, to say nothing of material supplied gratis by conquered foes, and of compulsory work rewarded only by the daily supply of rice.

'According to the original design, the emperor was to have had a similar tomb on the opposite bank of the river, and the two were to have been united by a bridge of fair white marble spanning the blue waters. Long ere this could be accomplished, however, he fell sick unto death. His body was laid beside that of his love in a chamber below the Taj, where, as in all those great tombs, the real sepulchre and the more ornamental sarcophagus stationed above ground are totally distinct. Above the tomb lights are kept constantly burning, and fresh garlands of roses and marigolds are ever and anon laid thereon, and given to those who visit the Taj. Formerly the attendants were for ever chanting verses from the Koran, and the sacred words were re-echoed by the great dome.

'Entering the building from beneath an arch which seems to reach to heaven, you pass in by a low portal, and find that the whole interior is laid with mosaic work more exquisite than even the most refined modern Florentine work.' 'But the perfection of loveliness is the marble screen, which in separate slabs extends all round the marble tomb. These slabs are very large and several inches thick, but they are pierced and carved with the most elaborate open-work patterns, till they simply resemble a piece of exquisite lace, with a border of chiselled flowers resembling fleur-de-lis. Just try to realize it—an immense circular screen of lovely lace, which, on closer inspection, proves to be solid marble.

'It was not till we returned at night to see the Taj by the light of a full moon that we realized its ethereal, unearthly loveliness, softened and undefined like some fairy dream. In the warm sunlight it seems to cut clear and sharp against the blue, like a glittering iceberg. In the moonlight it is still dazzling, but seems as though newly buried beneath a deep fresh fall of snow, lying lightly on domes and pavement and minarets, and rising above the tall cypresses and dark rich mass of foliage, like some strange vision of purity. You can scarce believe that it is real. You hold your breath lest you should awaken and find that the beautiful picture was but a dream.

'After awhile we returned into that exquisite interior. Weird-looking figures were burning blue lights, showing every nook and cranny of the great dome. Awed by the scene, we spoke to one another in low, subdued tones;

and struck by the numberless echoes of that wonderful tomb, we tested them by singing a few lines of "Brief life is here our portion." Straightway it seemed as though a chorus of unearthly voices took up the strain, and whispered the words again and again, and carried them away heavenward on the clouds of blue smoke that rose like incense—"Brief life is here our portion." '

XV.

PRINCESS AESHA.

Aesha was the daughter of Sultan Sujah, the second son of Shah Jehan. She is spoken of as being very beautiful, and as good as she was beautiful. Brought up in the court of the Great Mogul, she was early taught every accomplishment of the age, and being of a pleasant disposition and possessing great vivacity of spirits, she soon became the favourite of the imperial court. No great state festival or fancy fair, such as was held in those days, was considered complete without the presence of Aesha, the fair and the merry-hearted.

Amongst the numerous suitors of the lovely girl was one who was every way worthy. This was her cousin, Prince Mohammed, a son of Aurungzabe. The prince was handsome and clever, and though lacking a little in steadiness of purpose, was considered by everyone as an honourable man. And there was great rejoicing at the betrothal of Mohammed and Aesha. But it is as true in the East as in the West that the course of true love never runs smooth, and, through occurrences which we shall

now relate, these two happy hearts were to know much suffering and sorrow.

In the year 1657, in the twenty-ninth year of his reign, Shah Jehan was seized with paralysis, and no sooner was the fact noised abroad throughout the kingdom than there was great commotion. In anticipation of the emperor's decease, his unworthy sons quitted their respective governments of Bengal, Guzerat, and the southern provinces, and marched with all their forces straight on Delhi to contend for the throne. Dara, the eldest, was the favourite son and the heir-presumptive, but the others disputed his right, and were prepared for a struggle to snatch the imperial crown from his grasp.

It was in vain that Shah Jehan wrote to his sons, saying he was still alive and doing well; for, anticipating his speedy dissolution, they proceeded on their way. Troops, with Dara at their head, were sent out against the rebels; but after a contest which was long doubtful, victory at length declared itself on behalf of the rebellious brothers.

Dara fled, and Shah Jehan was made prisoner by his son Aurungzabe, who now showed himself in his true colours, a bold and able, but unscrupulous, prince. Having imprisoned his father, Aurungzabe slew his brother Morad, and sent troops in pursuit of Dara, who was taken and beheaded. The way to the throne thus cleared, Aurungzabe ascended it in 1658 A.D., in the fortieth year of his age.

During this fratricidal struggle our two lovers saw

little of each other, and were much distressed; but when the father of Mohammed became emperor, they supposed that the way was open for their speedy union. But the time was not yet.

Sultan Sujah the father of Aesha, and the only remaining brother of Aurungzabe, did not quietly acquiesce in the seizure of the government by that prince. Gathering together troops, he measured his strength with Aurungzabe on the plain before Allahabad, the 'city of God,' but was defeated.

From Allahabad, Sujah fled to Bengal, and there sought to retrieve his shattered fortunes. One of the first things he did was to send for his wife and children, that they might be out of the reach of the vengeance of Aurungzabe, when he returned to Delhi. Thus was the Princess Aesha separated from her lover; and to make the parting still more painful, she heard that Aurungzabe had bidden Prince Mohammed give up all hope of ever making her his wife. The bright face of the lovely maiden was overclouded with sorrow as it had never been before, when she turned her back on the place of her birth and happy girlhood, to go forth to share her father's misfortunes and perils.

It was at Monghyr that Sultan Sujah made a fresh stand, and there it was that his family rejoined him. Stragglers from the field of battle in the north-west came in daily, and receiving fresh reinforcements from many quarters, the sultan strengthened the fortifications of Monghyr, and threw up entrenchments from the fort to the hills.

But the imperial troops were not idle. Aurungzabe ordered one of his famous generals, Meer Jumla, and his son Prince Mohammed, to follow the retreating foe and drive Sujah from Bengal. The prince, sinking all personal feelings—his affection for Sujah and his love for Aesha—set off on his task not in the happiest frame of mind, but still with the determination to be an obedient son, and to do his duty as faithfully as he could. Little did he know that love erelong would prove stronger than every other tie!

Meer Jumla and Prince Mohammed after a toilsome march reached Monghyr, and encamped within a few miles of the fort. For a few days skirmishing parties from both armies tried each other's strength, and then feeling uncertain of his safety, Sultan Sujah withdrew his troops from Monghyr and retreated to Rajmehal. To his new retreat he was speedily followed, and having resisted six days' attacks with spirit, but being convinced of the unsafety of this place also, he embarked his family and all his valuables on board boats, and during a dark and stormy night crossed over the river to Tondah, the fortifications of which were strong and were made stronger. And fortunately for Sujah, the very night that he arrived safely in Tondah, the rainy season set in with great violence.

This respite, for it was impossible to carry on active warfare during the four rainy months, gave Sujah the opportunity of collecting fresh troops and munitions of war. And his affairs began now to assume a more favourable aspect, for in addition to the arrival of the

new troops, an event occurred which strengthened his hands and caused great alarm and anxiety to the imperial party. This important event was nothing short of the going over of Prince Mohammed to the camp of Sujah, and casting in his lot with the rebels.

The prince was of course led to take this step through his love for Aesha. The sorrowful maiden pining for her lover, and moved by compassion for her father's misfortune, wrote an affecting letter with her own hand to the prince. She lamented in the most pathetic terms the hardness of her fate, which had compelled her to see the man whom she had long considered as her husband waging relentless war against her revered sire, and pursuing him and his family to destruction. This letter kindled to a flame the affection and love of Prince Mohammed, and he resolved to relinquish all his prospects of the empire ; to forfeit his father's favour, and to abandon all the world for love.

Calling some of his friends together, and the officers of the army, he declared to them his intention of going over to the enemy at Tondah, and hoped that they would speedily follow him. For some time the assembly remained mute with astonishment; but instead of opposing the measure, and pointing out to the prince the folly of his designs, they, with that hypocrisy and flattery which are so disgraceful to Eastern diplomacy, said: 'Whatever your royal highness does must be right; and there can be no doubt if you go over to Sultan Sujah this evening, one-half of the army will join your standard by sunrise.'

However, when the prince had embarked in a pleasure boat for Tondah, his quondam friends sent off an express to his co-general, Meer Jumla, who was away in the country on imperial business, to inform him of the defection of Prince Mohammed and the necessity for prompt action.

When Jumla received this intelligence, he was struck with astonishment at the madness of the prince, and hastened back to camp. There he found everything in the greatest confusion, and many of the troops on the point of mutiny. Mounting an elephant, he rode into the midst of the disaffected army, harangued them, pointing out the folly of Mohammed, whom he stigmatized as a weak young man, governed only by his passion for a lovely woman, and regardless of his duty as a son of the emperor and a subject of the realm. This speech had the desired effect, and the troops were quieted.

Meanwhile, what rejoicings there were at Tondah on the arrival of the prince. His betrothed received him with thankfulness and delight. Sujah welcomed him with heart-felt joy, and the ladies of the palace hastened the preparations for the wedding. Soon the city of Tondah was a scene of festivity and rejoicing. No thoughts of danger or anticipation of future evil were allowed to interfere with the enjoyment of the present. The nuptials of Mohammed and Aesha were celebrated with great pomp, and the whole city was ablaze with illuminations. Thus under the most romantic circumstances were these two affectionate and faithful souls united. Love had once more in human history proved

itself the victor over every discouragement and every drawback and difficulty.

But, alas! the marriage festivities were scarcely concluded, when the city was aroused from its dream of happiness by the intelligence of the approach of the imperial forces.

Sultan Sujah and Prince Mohammed gave battle to the troops sent against them on the plain outside the city walls, and were defeated with great slaughter. Effecting their escape, they re-entered the city; but fearing to trust to its strength, they embarked that night with their families and treasures on board swift-rowing boats, and made the best of their way to Dacca.

When Aurungzabe, at Delhi, heard of the defection of Mohammed and of his marriage with his cousin Aesha, he was overwhelmed with astonishment and rage, and feared for his throne, anticipating that the troops in Bengal would follow the prince into the enemy's camp. Gathering together as large an army as he could at a moment's notice, the emperor placed himself at its head, and started for the seat of war. He had actually marched several days on the route to Bengal, when the glad tidings reached him of the success of his arms at Tondah, and of the flight from that place of the rebellious princes.

Returning to Delhi in a calmer frame of mind, Aurungzabe was yet far from easy or content, for as long as the Prince Mohammed was with Sujah, there was always a probability of his brother being again enabled to contend for the empire. Thinking over this matter,

the wily monarch devised a stratagem to break off the friendship of the two princes.

It was a letter that led Prince Mohammed to unite his fortunes with Sujah; and it was a letter, though not a love-letter, that was to 'separate chief friends.' Aurungzabe wrote an epistle as if addressed secretly to Mohammed, containing hints of the latter being willing to betray his father-in-law to death, though there was not a word of truth in the allegations. This letter was sent by a special messenger, who had instructions to throw himself in the way of Sujah's spies, so that he should be discovered and the missive taken from him by Sujah.

The epistle ran as follows: 'To our beloved son Mohammed, whose happiness and safety are joined with our life. It was with regret and sorrow that we parted with our son, when his valour became necessary to carry on the war against Sujah. We hoped, from the love we bear to our firstborn, to be gratified soon with his return, and that he would have brought the enemy captive to our presence in the space of a month, to relieve our mind from anxiety and fear. But seven months passed away without the completion of the wishes of Aurungzabe. Instead of adhering to your duty, Mohammed, you betrayed your father, and threw a blot on your fair fame. The smiles of a woman have overcome filial piety. Honour is forgotten in the brightness of her beauty; and he who was destined to rule the empire of the Moguls has himself become a slave. But as Mohammed seems to repent of his folly, we

forget his crimes. He has invoked the name of God to vouch for his sincerity, and our parental affection returns: he has already our forgiveness; but the execution of what he proposes is the only means to regain our favour.'

This ambiguous and suspicious document was read by Sujah, and produced that effect on his mind that Aurungzabe expected. He became suspicious of the good faith of his son-in-law, and all the protestations of Mohammed could not remove his suspicions. Sujah had an affection for the prince, and he was more grieved and vexed at being disappointed in the judgment which he had formed of him than at the supposed treachery.

Mohammed got his beloved Aesha, who never doubted him for a moment, to speak to Sujah and try to remove his discontent and anger; but the fair lady pleaded in vain, for the sultan pointed to the letter, and said that it bore upon it the stamp of truth. And the lying epistle wrought its wicked mission. After three days of great agitation of spirit Sujah sent for his son-in-law, and told him in the presence of his council that after all the struggles of affection with suspicion, the latter had prevailed; that he could no longer behold Mohammed with an eye of friendship, should he even swear to his innocence in the holy temple at Mecca; that the bond of union and confidence which had lately subsisted between them was broken, and that instead of a son and friend he beheld him in the light of an enemy.

'It is necessary,' said the sultan, 'for the peace of both that we should part. And take your wife, Aesha,

with you, and all the wealth and jewels which belong to her rank. The treasures of Sujah are open. You may take whatever you please. Only, go! Aurungzabe should thank me for sending away his son before he has committed a crime.'

With increasing sadness and dismay Prince Mohammed listened to the wrathful sultan. He felt the injustice of the reproaches; he admired the magnanimity of Sujah; he pitied the sorrows of his father-in-law; but his own condition was equally deplorable. He knew the stern rigour of Aurungzabe, who never trusted any man twice, and who would not overlook rebellion even in his own son. The prospect was full of gloom on either side. Distrust and misery were with Sujah, and a prison was the least punishment to be expected from Aurungzabe.

That night was a sad one for the husband and wife—almost alone in the world, with scarcely a friend. Happily they both believed in the goodness of God, and stayed themselves upon Him. On the morrow they prepared to leave the city and their kindred, but it was not done without a struggle and without tears. The mother of Aesha gave her daughter her blessing, and Sujah presented them with jewels, plate and money to a great amount. Under such sad circumstances did the but lately wedded pair turn their backs on those they loved, and pursue their journey to the imperial camp in Bengal to give themselves up.

As Mohammed drew near to the troops he had once commanded, and to the general with whom he had once co-operated, his melancholy increased, for the irony of

his fate came home to his heart. He almost regretted the step he had taken a few months before. But a glance at his lovely, brave, and patient wife, who, in all his trials, was ever faithful and true, revived his spirits, and gave him fresh heart. He thanked God for Aesha, and whispered to her as she was carried along by his side, 'Come what may, we have been happy together.'

Having approached within a few miles of the imperialists, Mohammed sent to announce his arrival to the vizier, Meer Jumla, who hastened to receive him with all the honours due to his rank. A squadron with drawn swords encircled the prince and princess, and conducted them to a tent, where they were detained as prisoners until instructions came from Aurungzabe to send them on to Delhi. Thither the unfortunate ones were carried by forced marches, and, according to one story, after appearing before Aurungzabe and listening to his upbraidings, they were imprisoned in the dreary fortress of Gwalior till death put an end to their misfortunes.

It has been discovered of late years, however, that the lovers did not die at Gwalior. In 1672 they were forgiven and removed to Sebneghur, and received an allowance of a thousand rupees per month for their private expenses. In 1675 Mohammed was made commander of twenty thousand, and presented with a lakh of rupees. In 1678 the prince died, and was buried close to the celebrated saint, Cuttub Addin, near Delhi.

At what date and under what circumstances the Princess Aesha died we cannot say. Of her latter days we can gather nothing. All we are sure of is, that she

bravely shared her husband's misfortunes, and lived to rejoice in his returning prosperity. She was a noble woman, and her name will ever be remembered in the annals of India, and the influence of her example will ever be for good. She being dead, yet speaketh.

XVI.

THE RANEE OF JODPORE.

The Ranee of Jodpore, the wife of Jeswunt Sing, though a beautiful lady, was famous more for her courage and determination of character than for her beauty. She was a princess of the house of Mewar, one of the strongest and proudest of the Rajpoot clans.

She was married when quite a girl to the renowned Jeswunt Sing of Jodpore, or Marwar, and in the new princely house to which she was taken her daring spirit found much to feed upon, and she sympathized with and helped her husband in all his bold plans and undertakings.

Jeswunt Sing was one of the most remarkable men of his day, and influenced greatly the stirring events which were then taking place in India. It was the time of the struggle of the sons of Shah Jehan for the empire of the East, and the different Mohammedan factions were turning to the Hindu rajahs to aid them in their schemes of aggrandizement.

The Rajah of Jodpore, influenced to no slight extent

by his wife, who was a strong partisan of Shah Jehan and Dara, went forth to assist the emperor with his forces. And the brave ranee took charge of the city of Jodpore during the absence of her lord.

With some thousands of Rajpoots and a number of imperial troops, Jeswunt Sing sought to stop the progress of Aurungzabe, and Morad towards Delhi. Near the Nerbudda, about fifteen miles south of Oojein, a battle was fought, and though the Rajpoots behaved with their accustomed bravery, through the desertion of the emperor's troops they lost the day. By sunset ten thousand of their number were dead on the field of battle, and Jeswunt Sing, with the remnant of his forces, retreated to his own country.

It was with a heavy heart that he drew near to Jodpore, for he knew that his favourite queen, the ranee, would be terribly distressed at his defeat and flight, on account of the shame and disgrace to themselves, as well as the disappointment it would be to Shah Jehan. And he was right: the ranee *was* distressed, and showed it in a way that was novel and startling for the wife of a Hindu prince, who is generally supposed to stand in fear and awe of her lord.

Bernier says: 'The wife of Jeswunt Sing, when she heard her husband was nigh, and had understood what had passed in the battle—that he had fought with all possible courage, that he had but four or five hundred men left, and at last, no longer able to resist the enemy, had been forced to retreat—instead of sending someone to condole with him in his misfortunes, commanded to

shut the gates of the castle, and not to let the disgraced men enter.

'"He was not her husband!" she cried; "the son-in-law of the great Rana of Mewar could not have a soul so mean; he was to remember that, being grafted into so illustrious a house, he must imitate its virtue; in a word, he was to vanquish or die." A moment after she was of another humour. She commanded a pile of wood to be laid, that she might burn herself. She said they had deceived her; that her husband must needs be dead; that it could not be otherwise. And after a little while she was seen to change countenance, to fall into a passion, and break into a thousand reproaches against him.

'In short, she remained thus transported eight or nine days without being able to resolve to see her husband, till at last, her mother coming, brought her in time to herself by assuring her that, as soon as the rajah had refreshed himself, he would raise another army to fight Aurungzabe and repair his honour.'

When the wrath of the ranee was appeased the gates of the city were thrown open, and Jeswunt Sing entered. And the hero did not upbraid his wife for her contumacy, for he admired her spirit and daring, and was proud rather than otherwise of one who had the courage to set even her husband at defiance when she thought he was to blame.

And the ranee, who was as loving as she was spirited, attended, after her anger was over, with tender care to her husband's wounds, and the wounds of his companions in arms.

Aurungzabe, who ascended the throne soon after these events, sent assurances of pardon to Jeswunt, and bade him bring a strong force to assist him in his struggle with Sujah. The rajah, seeing in this summons a chance of revenge, sent word that he would not delay in joining the troops of Aurungzabe at Khujwa, thirty miles north of Allahabad. And as he set off on his expedition the ranee smiled a bright farewell, assuring him that she had had dreams which augured that he would be prosperous, and return laden with spoil.

When the day of battle arrived Jeswunt took his stand on the side of Aurungzabe's forces, but at the first onset wheeled about with his gallant cavaliers, and attacked the rearward of the imperial army, which he cut to pieces. Advancing then suddenly on the imperial tent, which was left unprotected, he deliberately loaded his camels with the most valuable effects, and, leaving the brothers Aurungzabe and Sujah to fight out their battle, hoping with all his heart that they would destroy each other, he went off with his spoils, which included the royal tent itself, to his own territories. Great was the rejoicing at Jodpore, and especially in the palace, at this brilliant, if somewhat base, achievement, the ranee declaring that the past defeat and disgrace were amply condoned.

For a time Jeswunt remained quiet in his stronghold, but erelong there came another epistle from Aurungzabe, who had won the day at Khujwa, assuring him once more of his entire forgiveness, and offering him the viceroyalty of Guzerat, if he would simply remain

neutral in the strife that was being waged amongst the imperial brothers for the sovereignty of India. Tempted by this rich bait, Jeswunt signified his consent, and set off for his viceroyalty in the south.

To Guzerat Jeswunt took his eldest son, who was now old enough to bear arms, and who had the spirit and fire of his mother. There father and son remained for some time, winning for themselves great renown in the wars they waged against Sevaji, and other foes of the state.

It is not our intention, however, to recount all the exploits of Jeswunt Sing, but only those incidents in his brilliant career in which the Ranee of Jodpore bore a part.

Leaving, then, many interesting events untold, we come to the time, when Aurungzabe, firmly established on the throne of the Moguls, resolved to destroy, if possible, the power of Jeswunt, and compass his ruin. The emperor had never forgiven the past actions of the rajah, and had only been biding his time to work his destruction. In 1670, gladly availing himself of a rebellion amongst the Afghans in Cabul, he sent for Jeswunt, and appointed him to the chief command of the troops he was sending to punish the rebels. The expectation of the emperor was that the turbulent and almost savage Afghans would capture and slay the troublesome rajah and his Rajpoots.

Jeswunt Sing accepted the post at once, mainly because it was the post of honour and danger; and his ranee, when she heard of the enterprise, gladly ac-

quiesced in it, and proffered to accompany her husband and share his perils.

It was arranged that their son, Pirthi Sing, who had arrived at man's estate, should take charge of the ancestral dominions, and that their other sons should go with them; and when all was satisfactorily settled the rajah and ranee, with a large force of chosen troops, upon whom they could depend, set out for the campaign against the Afghans.

Scarcely had Jeswunt departed when the perfidious Aurungzabe sent for Pirthi Sing to appear at court. When the young man arrived the emperor received him with specious courtesy, asked after the welfare of the rajah and ranee, and hoped that the expedition on which they had started would be a prosperous and glorious one.

But though Aurungzabe received the heir of Jeswunt with kindness and the distinctions which were his due, he purposed in his heart to slay him. One day when the young rajah entered his presence the emperor stepped up to him with unusual familiarity, and grasping firmly his folded hands, the usual attitude of deference in one of his rank, said, 'Well, rahtore, it is told me you possess as nervous an arm as your father, and the spirit of your mother. What can you do?'

'God preserve your majesty,' replied the Rajpoot prince; 'when the sovereign of mankind lays the hand of protection on the meanest of his subjects, all his hopes are realized; but when he condescends to take both of mine, I feel as if I could conquer the world.' His

vehement and animated demeanour gave full force to his words, and Aurungzabe sharply exclaimed, 'Ah! here is another Jeswunt'; yet affecting to be pleased with the frank boldness of the prince's speech, he ordered him a splendid dress, which, as was customary, Pirthi Sing put on, and having made his obeisance, left the presence in the certain assurance of promotion and exaltation.

But, alas! that day was his last. When he reached his quarters he was taken suddenly ill, and soon expired in great torture; and to the present time his death is attributed to the poisoned robe of honour presented by Aurungzabe.

In the refinement of cruelty, the emperor sent off an express to Cabul to acquaint the bereaved Jeswunt and his ranee of the death of their heir, and to condole with them in their grief. Great was the sorrow of Jeswunt, and terrible was the anguish of heart of the ranee, who was so proud of her brave and warlike son. And to add to their troubles, the ungenial climate of Afghanistan took off their remaining sons, Juggut Sing and Dalthurman.

And not long did Jeswunt Sing survive his children. Some say that grief broke his heart, but others maintain that he died from poison administered by the orders of Aurungzabe, who had vowed that he should never return alive from Cabul. It is every way likely that he met with foul play, for the enmity which the emperor cherished for him was something awful in its intensity. A chronicler of the time expressed the general feeling of the public when he said, 'Sighs never ceased flowing from Aurungzabe's heart while Jeswunt lived.'

The situation of the ranee, away in the wilds of Afghanistan, without husband and without sons, was a very sad one; and the sorrowful lady, weary of life, intimated her determination to burn with her lord, as became a loving and faithful wife. But her friends and faithful retainers interfered and forcibly prevented her carrying out her resolution, for it was known that she expected another baby ere many weeks should elapse.

When news of the death of the gallant chief reached Jodpore, the Rajpoots were almost in despair at the loss of the defender of their faith. 'The bells of the temples were mute, the sacred shell no longer sounded at sunrise, the Brahmins vitiated their doctrines, and learned the Moslem creed.'

In a little time the ranee was safely delivered of a boy in the city of Cabul; and when she was able to travel, the rahtore contingent, with their infant prince, who was named Ajit, his mother, the daughters and establishment of their late rajah, prepared to return to their native land.

In due course they arrived at Delhi, and having related to Aurungzabe the sad events which had occurred in Afghanistan, the ranee and her train determined to push on for Jodpore. But they were not to get away without a struggle. The unrelenting tyrant, carrying his vengeance towards Jeswunt even beyond the grave, demanded that the infant Prince Ajit should be surrendered to his custody. The ranee, however, refused, and her brave Rajpoots supported her. When the emperor tempted them to give up their prince, by

promising to divide amongst them the lands of Jodpore, they replied, 'with eyes red with rage,' 'Our country is with our sinews, and these can defend both it and our lord.'

Departing from the presence of Aurungzabe, they prepared for a struggle. Their first thought was how to secure the safety of their prince and the ranee, and here a woman's wit was superior to all the cunning of men. The ranee assured them that, as for herself, she would take her share and chance in the fight for liberty; and as for the baby boy, they might leave him to her, and she would see that he was soon placed beyond all harm.

The next day the infant prince was concealed in a basket of sweetmeats, and entrusted to a Moslem who pitied the misfortunes of the Hindu princely house, and promised on the Koran to convey his precious charge outside the city walls, and remain with him at a certain appointed spot till some of them appeared to claim him.

Immediately the man had departed with the lad, there was a consultation of the brave Rajpoots; and as it seemed impossible to ensure the safety of their wives and children, the terrible resolution was formed of putting them to death, so that they should not fall into the hands of Aurungzabe, who would only work them evil. All the women of the party, except the ranee, were placed in an apartment filled with gunpowder, and at a given signal a torch was applied and the awful sacrifice was accomplished.

Then buckling on sword and armour, the Rajpoots, with the brave ranee in their midst, sallied forth from the

palace they occupied, which was surrounded by imperial troops, and endeavoured to cut their way out of the city. 'They made oblations to the gods, took a double portion of opium, and mounted their steeds.' Like heroes they fought and like heroes they fell, and but a small company lived to tell the tale. That battle fought in the streets of Delhi by the brave little band of Rajpoots was one of the most glorious on record, for it was one against a thousand, and it was for their princess and her infant son, and for their fatherland.

When the ranee, who survived the conflict, and her few warriors reached the spot appointed for the hiding-place of the infant prince, they found him safe and sound, as the Moslem sweetmeat-seller had faithfully executed his trust. With rapture beyond words to express, the ranee received her child, and, hurrying away with him, she rested not till she had carried him into the presence of her kinsman, the Rana of Mewar, and from the rana she prayed for sanctuary for the prince during the dangers of his minority.

That sanctuary was promptly and gladly granted, and the young Ajit was sent off under safe escort to the isolated rock of Aboo, where he was placed in a monastery of recluses and reared with care and devotion.

The Ranee of Jodpore returned to the capital of her kingdom, and there nursed the spirit of resistance against Aurungzabe, and supported her son's rights until he was of age to take the field himself against the enemies of their house. The heroic lady did not live to

see how famous her son became, but she survived long enough to rejoice in the return of the tide of prosperity to the city and territories of Jodpore. In a good old age, and full of honours, she entered into her rest, glad at the thought of joining her lord, the gallant Jeswunt Sing, in the mansions of the blest.

XVII.

THE PRINCESS OF ROOPNAGURH.

Of the early days of the Princess of Roopnagurh we can gather nothing. Though the daughter of a famous Rajpoot house, it is probable she would never have been known beyond her own clan or country, except for a remarkable episode which not only brought the princess to public notice; but had a great influence on the events of the time.

The Emperor Aurungzabe, unlike his predecessors Jehangir and Shah Jehan, was a man of unmixed Tartar blood. Jehangir was the son of a Rajpoot princess of Amber, and Shah Jehan of a princess of the house of Marwar. Aurungzabe, however, was the offspring of a Mogul dame. And there can be no doubt that the want of consanguinity with the Hindus was the cause of much of the opposition he met with during his struggle for the throne and throughout his reign. The great moral strength derived from the unity of the indigenous races with their conquerors was a patent fact, for during no similar period was the empire so secure, nor the Hindu race so cherished, as during the reigns of Jehangir and Shah Jehan.

The politic Aurungzabe was not blind to this defect in himself, and he tried to remedy it in his successors by taking to wife more than one Rajpoot lady by whom he had children. And it was in the carrying out of this policy of obtaining Rajpoot wives that the heroine of our story, the Princess of Roopnagurh, was brought to notice and became famous.

The agents of Aurungzabe, in looking round the royal houses of Rajpootana for lovely ladies to transplant to the emperor's harem, saw the Princess of Roopnagurh, and carrying tidings of her high birth and beauty to Aurungzabe, that monarch determined to make her his own.

Without delay the emperor sent an embassy, and a force of two thousand horse, to demand the hand of the fair lady, and to escort her to his capital.

Compliance with his wishes he considered certain, as in previous cases; but he had a lady with a will of her own and with spirit to deal with, and he soon found out that, emperor though he was, he could not get everything he desired. The haughty Rajpootani, hating the oppressor of her race, and indignant at the manner in which he sought her hand, rejected with disdain the proffered alliance, and announced her determination to die rather than consent to become the wife of Aurungzabe.

But before proceeding to such an extremity, she determined to try another plan of foiling the designs of the emperor, and that was to become the wife of a prince of her own race.

In 1654 Rana Raj Sing mounted the throne of

Mewar, and distinguished himself by one or two gallant exploits, making his name famous. And it was to this chief of the Rajpoot race that the Princess of Roopnagurh turned in her hour of need. Justified by brilliant precedents, she resolved to entrust her cause to the chivalrous rajah, offering herself as the reward of his protection.

Accordingly, the princess addressed a letter to the rana, which she sent by the hands of the family priest, her preceptor, who deemed his office honoured by being the messenger of her wishes. The letter, after expressions of friendship, if not something more, referred to the demand of Aurungzabe for her hand, about which she said in bitter scorn and anger: 'Is the swan to be the mate of the stork; a Rajpootani, pure in blood, to be wife to the monkey-faced barbarian?' She scouted the very idea, and declared her fixed resolve to take her life if not rescued and married by the noble rana.

With joy, Rana Raj Sing received the epistle of the princess, and resolved to win the brave lady for his bride, and to seize the opportunity to throw away the scabbard and commence a warfare with Aurungzabe for the freedom of his country and the defence of the Hindu faith.

With a chosen band of brave warrior associates, the rana passed the foot of the Aravadi, and appearing suddenly before the fortress of Roopnagurh, cut up the imperial guards, and bore off the princess to his capital. The lady was in raptures at the brave deed, and loving the handsome and chivalrous rajah, she gladly fulfilled

her promise, and entered his palace, after the prescribed marriage rites had been performed, as his wife.

The anger and rage of Aurungzabe, when the news of the abduction was carried to him, were more than words can describe, for he not only felt the loss of the lady, but the shame of the circumstances under which it had been effected. His authority had been scorned and his power set at defiance.

What occurred immediately after this episode is uncertain, for, as Colonel Tod remarks, 'the annalist of Rajpootana is but an indifferent chronologist,' and mixes up different events. However, it seems pretty certain that for the time the haughty Aurungzabe, owing to pressure of other troubles, had to swallow the insult and bear as best he could the triumphant revilings of the exultant lady who had escaped from his grasp and become the wife of the hero of her choice.

And while the emperor, who never forgot and never forgave an insult, was waiting for the hour of retribution, the princess and her husband were happy in each other's society, and were looking after the welfare and happiness of their subjects.

About this time there occurred one of those awful famines from which the people of India have suffered at intervals for centuries. This event called out the sympathy and active help of the princess. A description of the disaster in the words of a native historian of the time will give us a very clear idea of the frightful character of an Eastern famine. 'For want of water the world was in despair, and people went mad with hunger.

Things unknown as food were eaten. The husband abandoned the wife, the wife the husband; parents sold their children—time increased the evil; it spread far and wide; even the insects died: they had nothing to feed on. Thousands of all ages became victims to hunger. Those who procured food to-day ate twice what nature required. The wind was from the west, a pestilential vapour. The constellations were always visible at night, nor was there a cloud in the sky by day; and thunder and lightning were unknown. Such portents filled mankind with dread. Rivers, lakes, and fountains were dried up. Men of wealth meted out the portions of food. The ministers of religion forgot their duties. There was no longer distinction of caste, and the Sudra and the Brahmin were undistinguishable. Strength, wisdom, caste, tribe were all abandoned, and food alone was the object. Fruits, flowers, everything vegetable, even trees, were stripped of their bark, to appease the cravings of hunger: yea, *man ate man;* cities were depopulated. The seed of families was lost, the fishes were extinct, and the hope of all extinguished.'

During this terrific pestilence, this fearful calamity, the princess acted the part of a philanthropist. There was enough and to spare in the royal granaries, and the good lady went in and out amongst the people, ministering to their sickness and supplying their wants. With such awful destitution around, it was not much that she could do; but what she could do she did, with cheerfulness and heartiness, and brought upon her head the blessing of him who was ready to perish.

One means of helping the poor was the finding employment for them by the erection of the great national work called Lake Rajsumund, about twenty-five miles north of the capital of Mewar. A small perennial stream, named the Gomtee, or 'serpentine,' flowing from the mountains of the Aravadi, was arrested in its course, and confined by an immense embankment so as to form a lake. The *band*, or dam, forms an irregular segment of a circle, embracing an extent of nearly three miles, and encircling the waters on every side except the space between the north-west and north-east points. This barrier, which confines a sheet of water of great depth, and about twenty miles in circumference, is entirely of white marble, with a flight of steps of the same material, throughout this extent, from the summit to the water's edge; the whole buttressed by an enormous rampart of earth.

'One million one hundred and fifty thousand pounds sterling contributed by the rana, his chiefs, and opulent subjects was expended on this work, of which the material was from the adjacent quarries.' 'But,' as Colonel Tod justly remarks, 'magnificent, costly, and useful as it is, it derives its chief beauty from the benevolent motive to which it owes its birth: to alleviate the miseries of a starving population, and make their employment conducive to national benefit.'

In the midst of wars and rumours of wars it is pleasing to find Hindu royalties thinking of, and caring for, their poor and miserable subjects. And it is not the least claim that the Princess of Roopnagurh, who had become

the Ranee of Mewar, has upon our attention and regard. that she took a prominent part in suggesting and seeing carried out that gigantic scheme of benevolence which remains even to this day as a testimony to her worth, and the worth of her royal husband.

Scarcely was Mewar freed from the dreadful famine, than a fresh trouble threatened the state, and also the other Hindu states; and this new trouble gave the princess and the rana another opportunity of showing the nobility of their characters.

We refer to the capitation tax called *Jezeya*. Aurungzabe had been trying for a few years to enforce the conversion of the Hindus to the Mohammedan faith by the severest penalties, but all his efforts had been in vain; for few had left the religion of their fathers, though fire and the sword had desolated their towns, villages and homesteads. Aurungzabe had to acknowledge that his proselytizing had failed.

Being in sad want of money, the emperor devised what he thought a clever way out of his difficulties, and a method of covering up his failure. He determined to institute a capitation tax 'to balance,' as he said, 'the account between the two religions.' One historian characterizes this enactment as so contrary to all notions of sound policy, as well as of the feelings of humanity, that reflection seeks the motive with amazement. Many of the people had not the means to pay, and certainly none had the desire, as the whole thing hinged on a question of religion. To refuse to meet the tax meant risk of imprisonment or death, while to meet it

meant acknowledging the superiority of Mohammedanism over Hinduism.

In this dilemma the Rana of Mewar spoke out bravely, putting courage into the breasts of his co-religionists, and teaching Aurungzabe and the Mohammedans a lesson of toleration.

Knowing the character of the princess and her abilities, there can be little doubt that Rana Raj Sing was influenced to a great extent in the course he took by his sensible and daring wife. After consultation it was decided to send a letter to Aurungzabe, to expostulate with him on the imposition of the capitation tax, and to urge him to withdraw it. 'This letter was written in a style of such uncompromising dignity, such lofty yet stern resolve, so much of soul-stirring rebuke, mingled with a boundless and tolerating benevolence, such elevated ideas of the Divinity, with such pure philanthropy, that it may challenge competition with any epistolary production of any age, clime, or condition.'

The rana in his letter referred to the wise conduct of Jehangir and Shah Jehan, and of the prosperity of the empire during their reigns, and then contrasted the past with the present. Speaking very plainly to Aurungzabe, he said: 'During your majesty's reign many have been alienated from the empire, and farther loss of territory must necessarily follow, since devastation and rapine now universally prevail without restraint. Your subjects are trampled under foot, and every province of your empire is impoverished; depopulation spreads, and difficulties accumulate. When indigence has reached the

habitation of the sovereign and his princes, what can be the condition of the nobles? As to the soldiery, they are in murmurs; the merchants complaining, the Mohammedans discontented, the Hindus destitute, and multitudes of people, wretched even to the want of their nightly meal, are beating their heads, throughout the day, in rage and desperation.'

And then coming to the point in hand, the capitation tax, the rana exclaimed: 'How can the dignity of the sovereign be preserved who employs his power in exacting heavy tributes from a people thus miserably reduced? At this juncture it is told from east to west that the Emperor of Hindustan, jealous of the poor Hindu, will exact a tribute. If your majesty places any faith in those books by distinction called Divine, you will there be instructed that God is the God of all mankind, not the God of Mohammedans alone. The pagan and the Mussulman are equal in His presence. Distinctions of colour are of His ordination. It is He who gives existence. In your temples, to His name the voice is raised in prayer; in a house of images where the bell is shaken, still He is the object of adoration. To vilify the religion or customs of other men is to set at naught the pleasure of the Almighty. When we deface a picture we naturally incur the resentment of the painter; and justly has the poet said, Presume not to arraign or scrutinize the various works of power Divine.'

This remarkable letter, meant to remove wrath, served, however, but to stir up the anger of the bigoted Aurungzabe more deeply; and calling to mind the abduction of

the lovely Princess of Roopnagurh just when she seemed to be in his power, the emperor determined to declare war against the brave rana, and after humbling him, demand possession of the coveted prize.

Aurungzabe made preparations for the campaign on a grand scale. His son Akbar and his troops were recalled from Bengal; Aznir from Cabul, and even Manzum from the war in the Deccan. The preparations more resembled those for the conquest of a potent kingdom than the subjugation of a Rajpoot prince of a small principality.

Hopeless as the contest seemed for Rana Raj Sing, that chieftain resolved to defend his queen and his country to the last. And the princess by her calm behaviour and inspiriting words roused the enthusiasm not merely of her husband, but of all his people, to fever-point, and they were ready to endure anything on her behalf, and on behalf of their fatherland.

When Aurungzabe reached Mewar, and entered the low countries, he found them deserted, for the inhabitants, knowing the indefensibility of the plains, had all retired with their effects to the hills. City after city was annexed; but the people were not conquered, and the emperor had eventually to attack them in their mountain fastnesses. And now came the turn of the Rajpoots. Troops were allowed to advance unopposed until they had reached intricate gorges and dangerous places, when they were vigorously attacked, and after desperate fighting defeated and almost destroyed. This

recurred again and again, until at length the baffled emperor was compelled to retire with but a remnant of the mighty army with which he had entered Mewar. The imperial standard, elephants, and state equipage fell into the hands of Rana Raj Sing; and there was rejoicing deep and loud throughout the length and breadth of Rajpootana. This glorious victory occurred in March, 1680.

The outcome was favourable to the Hindus, but not as favourable as was hoped. Aurungzabe was only defeated, not dethroned, and soon he was in a position to take the field again. Not being anxious, however, to continue the struggle, he listened to overtures of peace from the rana, and the war was concluded 'without assertion or release of the capitation tax.' Though nominally not withdrawn, Aurungzabe, however, did not dare to collect the tax to any extent. Thus, though his country was laid waste, the victory in the struggle really lay with Rana Raj Sing.

The princess throughout the devastating war remained with her husband, cheering him in his troubles, and comforting, consoling and strengthening him by her love. She cared not that they were driven from their home. She was happy that she was out of the power of Aurungzabe, and with the man who had won her heart. In good and in evil report she was a faithful, affectionate and helpful wife. To some extent she felt that she was the cause of her husband's misfortunes; but she tried to make up for that by giving him the whole of her

true womanly heart. And the rana never regretted the day when, with a band of devoted tribesmen, he swooped down from the Aravadi, and carried away as his bride, from the soldiers of Aurungzabe, the Princess of Roopnagurh.

XVIII.

THE BEGUM SOMBRE.

The origin of the Begum Sombre is uncertain. There are some who say that she was a Cashmerean dancing-girl, but others deny it, and assert that her pedigree was something more noble. Franklin says she was the daughter of a decayed Mogul chief; and Sleeman remarks that she was by birth a Squadanee, or lineal descendant from Mohammed, the founder of the Mussulman faith.

While there is a difference of opinion about her origin, there is none whatever about her force of character or her beauty. She was a little woman, with refined and delicate features, and was universally considered strikingly handsome in her youth; and throughout her life was remarkable for her strength of will, indomitable courage, and fertility of resource in times of difficulty or danger.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century the Cashmerean dancing-girl, or the lineal descendant of Mohammed, whichever we prefer, attracted the notice of a French adventurer named Walter Reinehard, who

married her, and treated her with great respect and kindness.

Reinehard, who was born in the electorate of Trèves, came out to India as a carpenter in the French sea service, and soon after his arrival received from his comrades the nickname of Sombre, from the sombre cast of his countenance and temper. By degrees this adventurer increased in wealth and influence, entering the service of different native princes, and gathering together a number of troops, which he held at the disposal of the highest bidder.

For a time he served the unfortunate Meer Cassim, the Nawab of Bengal. He also took service with the Rajah of Jeypore. And from the rajah he passed to the imperial service at Delhi. And it was while at Delhi that there was assigned to the fortunate adventurer the *pergunnah* of Serdhanah in Jeydad, worth six lakhs of rupees a year. Retiring to his little kingdom, Sombre strengthened the capital city, and sought by judicious conduct to retain it, and establish himself firmly in the land.

His wife, with whom we are chiefly concerned, was styled begum, or princess, which title she could claim, as Sombre was now a beg, or a noble, in virtue of holding the little principality of Serdhanah. The begum proved very useful to her husband in all his affairs, showing sound judgment and great talents, and when he died, in the year 1778, she was elected by acclamation of the troops as their head, and the ruler of the principality.

The election of the begum was the more extraordinary as Sombre left one son by a former wife, a Mohammedan lady. This son was named Zaffer Yab Khan, but he was a man of weak character, upon whom the troops could not rely.

The election of the begum to be the head of the little state of Serdhanah was confirmed by the emperor, Shah Alum, who had known and favoured her husband. And Zaffer Yab Khan removed to Delhi on a liberal allowance.

The troops under the begum consisted of five battalions of natives, about two hundred European officers and artillerists, and forty pieces of cannon. Even while Sombre lived, these troops were an insubordinate lot, the majority of them being adventurers like their master; and when the begum assumed the reins of government they gave her much trouble. But she was determined to be obeyed, and only waited for an opportunity to show her power. It came when she was encamped with the imperial army at Muttra, near Agra.

News was brought to her one day that two slave girls had set fire to her houses at Agra, in order that they might make off with their paramours, two soldiers of the guard she had left in charge. These houses had thatched roofs, and contained a vast amount of valuables of all kinds, as well as the widows, wives and children of her principal officers. The fire fortunately was discovered early, and after strenuous exertions put out; but not before much damage had been done, and a great deal of property destroyed.

The two slave girls were caught in the bazaar, and

taken to the begum in her camp. She had the affair thoroughly investigated at once, and their guilt being proved to the satisfaction of all present, she ordered them to be flogged till they were senseless, and then thrown into a pit dug in front of her tent for the purpose, and buried alive.

This terrible example of her determination of character convinced both her European officers and her native troops that she was a woman to be feared, and it is said that for some years after the event her orders were implicitly attended to, whereas, if she had faltered in her punishment of the offenders, it would have been impossible for her to have controlled the unruly spirits amongst her mercenaries for a month. It is a pity, however, that she did not devise some other and more humane method of punishment than that of burying alive.*

To the Emperor of Delhi, the begum was always faithful, remembering with gratitude the gifts and honours her husband and herself had received at his hands. Shah Alum was now an old man, and was a mere puppet in the power of first one minister and then another. The glory had departed from the Moslem rule, and the emperor only retained his throne on sufferance. The Sikhs, the Mahrattas, and the English were gra-

* Of late the truthfulness of the story of the begum's treatment of the two slave girls has been denied. We are afraid, however, that it is but too true ; for such deeds were not uncommon at the time the begum lived and ruled. Sleeman vouches for the truth of it. See 'Rambles and Recollections,' vol. ii., p. 387.

dually possessing themselves of the authority and possessions of the Moguls.

The Begum Sombre soon after the sad episode of the death of the two slave girls was able to show her friendship for the emperor in a very practical and useful way. Shah Alum was making a progress through the districts round about Delhi, in order to reduce certain rebels to order, and commenced operations by attacking Nujjuff Koolee Khan, a proud refractory noble who held the strong fort of Goculghur.

This chieftain resisted with spirit, and kept the royal forces at bay for some time, and one day observing a negligent outlook in their camp, he surprised them by a rapid sortie which threw them into confusion. Just when the imperial army seemed about to fly, the Begum Sombre appeared on the scene in her palanquin, and ordering up three battalions of her sepoys with a gun, under the command of the European adventurer George Thomas, she directed an attack on the enemy; and the king's troops rallying, the day was saved, and Nujjuff Koolee Khan defeated, and forced to humble himself to his sovereign. All agreed that the royal arms were saved from disgrace by the begum's energy, and the emperor himself in full durbar honoured her with a magnificent *khilut*, or present, and called her his 'most beloved daughter,' in addition to her other titles.

In 1781, three years after her husband's death, the begum was converted to Christianity, and was baptized at the age of forty by a Roman Catholic priest, under the name of Joanna. After this event, she had her

husband's remains, which had been buried in a garden at Agra, removed to consecrated ground in the Agra churchyard.

And having comfortably disposed of Sombre, the bright little lady conceived the idea of taking another husband. She was forty years of age, it is true, but she was still very handsome, and had another attraction in the way of wealth and power. George Thomas, it is said, aspired to her hand, and if he had obtained it, there is no saying what position that remarkable man would have carved out for himself in Northern India. As it was, he left her service and set up for himself, and ere he succumbed to superior power he had founded a principality, built himself a capital city, possessed twelve disciplined battalions of troops, had good artillery, cast his own guns, and coined his own money.

The begum would have done well to have accepted that genius as her second husband; but love is wayward and foolish at times, and the lady centred her affections on a Frenchman named Le Vaissaux, who was in her employ. The marriage was performed by Father Gregorio, a Carmelite monk, before Suleur and Bernier, two officers of great merit. Le Vaissaux, though not deficient in abilities, was stern and haughty, and his conduct soon brought trouble about the head of the infatuated begum. The good lady tried in vain to persuade her husband to receive all the European officers of the corps at their private table, as gentlemen, urging that not only their domestic peace, but their safety among such a turbulent set, required that the character

of these officers should be raised if possible, and their feelings conciliated.

Nothing, the proud and stupid man declared, should ever induce him to sit at table with men of such habits; and when this reached the ears of the officers, they were beside themselves with anger, and at last determined that no man should command them who would not respect them. The insolence of the officers, and the conduct of the soldiers generally, became at last so bad that the begum determined to go off alone with her husband, and seek an asylum within the territory of the East India Company.

Le Vaissaux communicated with the Governor-General of India, Sir John Shore, and it was at last settled that the begum should secretly resign her command. She and her husband were to steal away from their unruly troops, and, once within British territory, were to be treated as prisoners on parole, and permitted to reside at the French settlement of Chandernagore.

Some of the battalions at Delhi got information, however, of the correspondence, and made the son of Sombre declare himself as their legitimate prince; and then they started for Serdhanah, to seize the begum and her husband. Le Vaissaux heard of their approach, and urged his wife to set out with him at midnight for Anorpshehur, declaring that he would rather destroy himself than submit to the indignities which he knew would be heaped upon him by the infuriated troops. The begum consented, saying that she also would take her life sooner than fall into the hands of their foes.

The two therefore started, carrying with them a vast sum of money.

The begum got into her palanquin with a dagger in her hand. Le Vaissaux mounted his horse, and rode beside her, with a pair of pistols in his holsters and a sword by his side. They had only got as far as Kabru, about three miles from the city, when they heard the clatter of horses' feet, and found that a number of their troops, who had got intimation of their flight, were gaining fast upon them. Le Vaissaux asked the begum whether she was still determined to die, rather than submit to the indignities that threatened them. 'Yes!' she exclaimed, holding up the dagger firmly grasped in her hand. He drew a pistol from his holster and urged on the bearers. With ease he could have galloped off and saved himself; but his chivalry and love would not permit him to quit his wife's side.

At last the soldiers caught up to them. The female attendants of the begum began to scream, and Le Vaissaux, looking in, saw the white cloth that covered his wife's breast stained with blood. She had stabbed herself, but not fatally, and she had not courage to strike again. Her gallant husband, believing that she was mortally wounded, put a pistol to his temple, and fired. The ball passed through his head, and he fell dead on the ground. His body was treated with every indignity by the European officers and the soldiers, and the begum was taken back to Serdhanah a prisoner.

Zaffer Yab Khan, the son of Sombre, took charge of the government, and the unfortunate begum was very

badly treated. For seven days she was kept under a gun, deprived of all kinds of food, save what she got by stealth from a few who were faithful to her, and subjected to all manner of insolent language from the multitude.

In her adversity the begum recollected one who had been good to her in former days, even her rejected lover, George Thomas, and to him she contrived to send a piteous letter, declaring her apprehensions either from poison or the dagger, and beseeching him to come to her rescue. The generous man set off with his troops without delay, and, by dint of bribery and threatening, removed Zaffer Yab Khan from power, and brought the rebellious soldiers to their senses.

The begum was thereupon taken out from under the gun, where she had been enduring agonies of mind and body, and was reseated with all respect upon her musnud. It was a sudden and remarkable turn of Fortune's wheel. Then the strange sight was witnessed of the repentant European officers, about thirty in number, signing a paper in the presence of the begum, solemnly promising, in the name of God and Jesus Christ, that they would henceforward obey her with all their heart and soul, and recognise no other person whosoever as commander. They all affixed their seals to this solemn league and covenant, and withdrew from the presence with looks of contrition.*

* The singular wording of this remarkable document is worth noticing. It was written by a Mohammedan, and he would not write 'Christ the Son of God,' so it was agreed the words should be, 'In the name of God and His Majesty Christ.'

Thenceforward the begum was all-powerful, and had no further serious trouble with her troops. It was about that time also that she resolved to cast in her lot with the English, having the shrewdness to see that the East India Company was destined to conquer the whole country.

Her force, when she entered into an alliance with the British, consisted of six battalions, a party of artillery served by Europeans, and two hundred horse. 'She had a good arsenal well stored, and a foundry for cannon, both within the walls of the fortress, built near her dwelling at Serdhanah. The whole cost her about four lakhs of rupees a year; her civil establishment eighty thousand, her pensioners sixty, and her household establishments and expenses about the same, making a total of six lakhs of rupees a year.' But the revenues of Serdhanah and the other lands assigned her at different times much more than covered this large sum.

There is a story told of the begum's negotiations with the English that is curious, and characteristic of both parties concerned. She sent word to Lord Lake, who was in command of the British troops, that she was on her way to visit him. She arrived at head-quarters just after dinner, and being carried in her palanquin at once to the reception tent, his lordship came out to meet and receive her. As the adhesion of every petty chieftain was, in those days, of consequence, Lord Lake was not a little pleased at the early demonstration of the begum's loyalty; and being a little elevated by the wine which had just been drunk, he forgot the novel circumstances

of its being a female he was about to receive, instead of some well-bearded chief, so he gallantly advanced, and, to the utter dismay of her attendants, took her in his arms and kissed her. The mistake might have been awkward, but the lady's presence of mind put all right. Receiving courteously the proferred attention, she turned calmly round to her astonished attendants. 'It is,' said she, 'the salute of a padre (priest) to his daughter.' Seeing the begum was a Christian, the explanation was perfectly in character, though some of the spectators smiled at the appearance of the jolly red-coated clergyman, exhibited in the person of Lord Lake.

From the time the begum put herself under the protection of the British Government in 1803, she ceased to engagĕ her troops much in any kind of warfare. And by degrees she adopted the European modes of social intercourse, appearing in public on an elephant, in a carriage, and occasionally on horseback with her hat and veil. Sleeman says that 'she often entertained governors-general and commanders-in-chief with all their retinues, and sat with them and their staff at table, and for years kept open house for the society of Meerut.'

In no situation did the wonderful lady lose sight of her dignity. She never ceased to inspire the most profound respect in the minds of those who every day approached her and were on the most unreserved terms of intimacy. It speaks great things for her abilities and goodness of heart that Lord William Bentinck, when leaving India after his term of rule, should have addressed the following letter to her :

'*To Her Highness the Begum Sombre.*

'My Esteemed Friend,

'I cannot leave India without expressing the sincere esteem I entertain for your highness's character. The benevolence of disposition and extensive charity which have endeared you to thousands, have excited in my mind sentiments of the warmest admiration; and I trust that you may yet be preserved for many years, the solace of the orphan and widow, and the sure resource of your numerous dependents. To-morrow morning I embark for England, and my prayers and best wishes attend you, and all others who, like you, exert themselves for the benefit of the people of India.

'I remain, with much consideration,

'Your sincere friend,

'W. M. Bentinck.'

When the begum died, the bulk of her property, about sixty lakhs of rupees, went to a son of Colonel Dyce, the son-in-law of Sombre's son, Zaffer Yab Khan.

To give some idea of her wealth and how she spent her money, we will quote from Sleeman's 'Rambles and Recollections':

'The begum built an excellent church at Serdhanah, and assigned the sum of one hundred thousand rupees as a fund to provide for its service and repairs; fifty thousand rupees as another for the poor of the place; one hundred thousand as a third for a college in which Roman Catholic priests might be educated for the

benefit of India generally. She sent to Rome one hundred and fifty thousand rupees to be employed as a charity fund at the discretion of the Pope; and to the Archbishop of Canterbury she sent fifty thousand for the same purpose. She gave to the Bishop of Calcutta one hundred thousand rupees to provide teachers for the poor of the Protestant Church in Calcutta. She sent to Calcutta for distribution to the poor, and for the liberation of deserving debtors, fifty thousand. To the Catholic Missions at Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras, she gave one hundred thousand, and to that of Agra thirty thousand. She built a handsome chapel for the Roman Catholics at Meerut, and presented the fund for its support with a donation of twelve thousand; and she built a chapel for the Church Missionary Society at Meerut at a cost of ten thousand to meet the wants of the native Protestants.'

Thus we bring our story not unworthily to an end. She who began life poor and unknown, finished it rich and titled; and better still, she who at the beginning of her career was somewhat harsh and cruel, towards its close displayed uncommon gentleness and charity. There was much that was bad and very much that was good about the remarkable native lady who was known and respected so long as the Begum Sombre.

XIX.

RANEE SAHIB KOUR OF PATTIALA.

The state of Pattiala is the most powerful of the Sikh kingdoms, and the maharajah, who is entitled to a salute of seventeen guns, ranks second of all the Punjab chiefs in viceregal durbars, the Maharajah of Cashmere taking the first place. Sir Lepel Griffin says: 'The area of the Pattiala state is 5,412 square miles; the population is not accurately known, but is probably about 1,650,000: and the revenue is estimated at 3,800,000 rupees a year. A military force of 8,000 men is maintained, and a contingent of 100 men is furnished by the maharajah to the British Government for general service.'

Our story takes us back to the year 1793, when Rajah Sahib Singh, a young, weak, and profligate prince, was head of the state. Unable to rule wisely himself, and not being able to trust his unruly noblemen, Rajah Sahib Singh took the extraordinary step of appointing a lady to be his chief minister. This lady was his sister, the famous Ranee Sahib Kour.

Ranee Sahib Kour, remarkable from her girlhood for her beauty and cleverness, was at the time the wife of

Sirdar Jaimal Singh Kanheya, the master of a great part of the Bari Doab, above Dinanagar. With the hearty approval of her husband, who was proud of his wife's abilities, the bold lady consented to accept the difficult task of chief minister of Pattiala, on the understanding that she should be allowed to make any changes and carry out any reforms she thought necessary.

With such wisdom and vigour did the ranee act that in a short time many abuses were remedied, and the affairs of the state put on a more sure and satisfactory footing. The rajah was pleased, and the people generally were delighted with the return of internal peace and prosperity.

Not very long after the ranee had taken up her abode at Pattiala, news reached her of trouble into which her husband had fallen, through the enmity of a cousin, Fetah Singh. The anxious lady begged a strong force from the rajah, which he willingly granted, and heading the troops herself, she set off for Fatagurh, and rescued her husband, who had been captured and imprisoned by his enemy. It was a daring and spirited deed, and its successful ending helped not a little to strengthen her hands and confirm her power.

In 1794 a large Mahratta force crossed the Jumna and marched in the direction of Pattiala, receiving on the way the submission of many of the Sikh chiefs. A message was sent to Pattiala demanding the allegiance of that state, and no refusal was expected; for a weak prince and a lady prime minister were made light of by

the Mahrattas. However, they were soon to find out their mistake, for the ranee wrote a letter expressing in indignant terms her sense of the insult that had been offered, and daring the invaders to do their worst.

The spirit of resistance which the ranee thus showed was contagious; rajahs of neighbouring states flocked to the Pattiala standard, and the brave lady was able to take the field against the foe with a force of seven thousand men. The two armies met near Murdenpur, a few miles from Amballa, where a brisk engagement took place; but the Sikhs, who were far inferior to the Mahrattas in numbers and in discipline, suffered heavy loss, and began to give way.

It was at this juncture, when retreat seemed about to turn into flight, that Ranee Sahib Kour, who had marched with the troops, while her cowardly brother remained in his zenana, showed how fitted she was to rule. Stepping down from her *rath*, or chariot, she drew her sword, and called upon her disheartened troops to hear what she had to say. 'Soldiers of the Pattiala state!' she exclaimed, 'you will be for ever disgraced if you now fly and allow a woman and the sister of your chief to be slain, for I am determined never to retreat.'

This gallantry on the field of battle so shamed and encouraged the troops that they returned with renewed zeal to the fight, which they maintained with great determination, though with much loss, till nightfall, neither side being able to claim the victory. The ranee was now desired by her officers to return to Pattiala, while she was able, as the next day was sure to bring

with it utter defeat in their present crippled condition. The determined woman, however, refused point-blank, and advised, in her turn, and insisted upon, a night attack on the Mahratta camp. The very audacity of the proposal contained its best chance of success; the troops were immediately put under arms, and creeping up to the camp of their enemies, burst upon it like an avalanche.

The Sikhs did little more than gallop through the camp, cutting down any who opposed them, and the Mahrattas suffered no great loss; but the moral effect of the surprise was very great. The invaders were next day in a state of great confusion and alarm, realizing that they had a most able and determined character to contend against in the person of the leader of the Sikh forces, woman though she was. With mingled feelings of fear and respect they turned their faces homeward, and gave up the expedition. Thus was Pattiala saved by the skill and daring of Ranee Sahib Kour.

In 1796 the ranee headed a small army sent to Nahen to assist the rajah of that state, who had got into difficulties with his people, who were in open rebellion. As usual, the princess acquitted herself with credit, and remained at Nahen three months, settling the affairs of the little state, and reducing the insurgents to rebellion. For this service she received great praise, and the rajah gave her rich presents when she departed.

Two years after the Nahen expedition, the adventurer George Thomas, who had taken possession of Hansi and Hissar, began to encroach further on Sikh territory. He

had a force of eight regiments of foot, a thousand horsemen, and about fifty guns. Taking advantage of the absence of the principal Sikh chiefs at Lahore, he laid siege to the stronghold of Jhind, about twenty miles away from his own capital. Hearing of the danger, the chiefs hurried back to their states and assembled their forces for the relief of Jhind. In the skirmishes which now took place, Thomas had the decided advantage, and it might have fared badly with the allied troops if a large detachment of Pattiala troops, headed by the gallant lady, Ranee Sahib Kour, had not appeared on the scene.

So potent was her name, and so strong were now the united forces, that Thomas, seeing he was overmatched, raised the siege of Jhind, and retired to Mehm, whither he was pursued. His retreat, however, was only a feint, and adopting the same expedient that the ranee had once so successfully tried, he turned round and attacked the Sikh camp with two thousand men, in the dead of night. The Sikhs, except the ranee's troops, had kept no watch, and were carousing after their imaginary triumph of the day before, when Thomas's horse thundered into their midst, and scattered them in all directions.

The allied army after this became completely demoralized. One chief was jealous of another, and while united they were more than a match for Thomas, singly he was too strong for them. The war dragged on a short time longer, and then peace was made with Thomas, who on his part had now so many enemies that he was glad to make friends with the Sikhs, who were his sole

possible allies in the event of a quarrel with the Mahrattas. The only one who came out of the struggle with any credit was the Ranee Sahib Kour, who throughout had borne herself with dignity, and handled her troops with skill. If the other chiefs had acted with the same spirit as this lady, Thomas would have been crushed at the outset of the war.

However, peace was restored, and the ranee returned to Pattiala. And now, sad to say, when danger had ceased without, and the ranee needed rest from her labours, dissensions began within. The weak-minded rajah, influenced by favourites who were jealous of the prime minister's power, began to treat his sister with great coldness. The ranee had done the work which the rajah ought to have done for himself, and she had saved the state from destruction on more than one occasion; but all was now to be forgotten, and the reward of faithful service was to be reproach and contumely. She was charged with all kinds of imaginary offences, and the rajah pretended that he was in fear of his life at her hands.

When the ranee saw that the evil advice of his favourites had more weight with her brother than all her services, she withdrew from the city in disgust, and went to Bhirian, a new fort which she had built in her own *jagir*. This conduct the rajah took as confirmatory of his worst suspicions, and he ordered her to leave the fort, and go at once to her husband at Fatagurh.

As to going to her husband, it was just what the lady desired, but she could not brook the dictatorial tones of

the weak and vain rajah, so she took no notice of his order. Thereupon, the enraged chieftain marched to Bhirian, to punish the ranee for her contumacy. He reached the fort, and was making preparations to reduce it, when his advisers, afraid of the consequences of such an act, succeeded in persuading him that it would not be well to commence his military career by fighting with his sister. The ranee was also induced to submit, and return to Pattiala.

On the way, however, she was informed by some who loved her that her brother's intentions against her were evil. Watching her opportunity, she escaped, and returned with all speed to Bhirian. Thither the rajah followed her, and all the negotiations had to be commenced afresh. At last, on solemn promises of safety, she consented a second time to return to Pattiala; but when the rajah had conveyed her as far as Dhodan he broke his promises, and confined her in that fort as a state prisoner.

For some time the persecuted lady was retained at Dhodan, but at length she contrived to escape, changing clothes with one of her servants. When free, she made straight for her fortress of Bhirian, and finding her followers faithful, she strengthened the place, and prepared to resist her brother if he should again turn his arms against her.

The rajah, yielding to the pressure of some of the wisest of his favourites, decided, however, to leave the ranee alone, and at Bhirian the princess lived for some years, not again taking part in any of the stirring events

of the time, but quietly passing her existence in looking after her estates. Her husband visited her when not engaged in predatory warfare; but it was little that the husband and wife saw of each other. Their lives seemed to lie apart: but they had great esteem and respect for one another, and to the end were faithful and true.

In 1799 Ranee Sahib Kour died, the unjust treatment she had received having probably shortened her life. On all sides her loss was deeply mourned. Her wisdom, her bravery and her beauty had won the heart of the people, and it was felt to be a sad day for Pattiala when the lady who had done so much for the state was taken from them.

And Rajah Sahib Singh lived to repent his ungallant and ungrateful treatment of the sister who had ever sought his best interests, and had nobly defended his kingdom against its foes in very trying and dark hours.

XX.

THE VIRGIN PRINCESS KISHNA.

Kishna Komari (the Virgin Kishna) was the name of a lovely maiden whose beauty was the cause of fierce wars in Rajpootana and her own sad and tragic death. The mother of Kishna was of the Chamura race, the ancient kings of Anhulmara. Her father was the Rana of Mewar, the supreme head of the Rajpoot nation. Sprung from the noblest blood of Hind, and possessing beauty of face and person, and an engaging demeanour, Kishna, at sixteen years of age, was known far and wide as the 'flower of Rajasthan.'

In the year 1804 Rajpootana was made to pay the penalty of British success against Holkar and Scindia. The Mahrattas had been defeated in battle after battle, and had been completely humiliated, and their resources broken. Holkar, in his distress, cast about him how to fill his exhausted coffers, so as to be able to continue the struggle with the British, and at length decided to march on Rajasthan with a strong force, and compel the Rana of Mewar and other rajahs to assist him in his need.

From the Rana of Mewar was demanded the sum of

forty lakhs, or five hundred thousand pounds, of which one-third was to be instantly forthcoming. 'The palace was denuded of everything which could be converted into gold; the females were deprived of every article of luxury and comfort, by which, with contributions levied on the city, twelve lakhs were obtained; while hostages from the household of the rana and chief citizens were delivered as security for the remainder, and immured in the Mahratta camp.' And, not satisfied with all this spoil, Holkar remained eight months in Mewar, attacking city after city, and devastating the country wherever he went.

It might have been imagined that the miseries of the rana were not susceptible of aggravation, and that he had been humbled enough; but there was worse misfortune to follow. His daughter Kishna, whose beauty and affection had been so far a comfort to him, was now to become, through no fault of her own, a source of grave anxiety and trouble.

The beauty of the young princess had touched many hearts, and lovers from neighbouring states were casting longing eyes towards Mewar, with hopes of obtaining the object of their devotion. Out of all her suitors, her father chose for her the gallant Juggut Sing of Jeypur, and in June, 1806, this prince sent a detachment of three thousand troops with a formal proposal for Kishna's hand, and preliminary presents.

Now, however, difficulty and trouble arose. Another rajah, Rajah Manee of Marwar, who was also smitten with Kishna's charms, advanced pretensions for her,

founded on the princess having been actually betrothed a few years before to his predecessor. Manee argued very plausibly that the young lady was engaged to his predecessor, because he was Rajah of Marwar, and now that he was dead, she ought to accept the next occupant of the throne, to wit, himself. And to add force to his argument he vowed resentment and opposition if his claims were disregarded.

When Scindia, the Mahratta chief, heard of the dispute he threw the weight of his influence on the side of Rajah Manee, mainly because a pecuniary demand of his had been scornfully rejected by the Rajah of Jeypur. And when he heard of the detachment of Jeypur troops at the capital of Mewar, he sent off a swift messenger, demanding that the rana should dismiss the embassy, and refuse to give his daughter to the Jeypur prince.

The rana was indignant at Scindia's demand, and determined to hasten the marriage arrangements; but the Mahratta chief followed up his message by advancing with a force of eight thousand men into the valley, and encamped within cannon range of the city. There was no alternative, therefore, but to dismiss the nuptial party, and agree to whatever was demanded.

The heralds of Hymen being thus rudely repulsed, the Jeypur prince prepared to avenge his insulted pride and disappointed hopes, and for this purpose gathered together such an army as had not been seen in Rajpootana since the days of its glory. And the other claimant for Princess Kishna's hand was not slow to take up the gauntlet thus thrown down by his rival.

A terrible struggle now took place, into the details of which it is not our purpose to enter. There was great slaughter on both sides, but neither party would confess to being conquered; and neither party would relinquish his claim to the fair object of the war.

It was at this stage that a suggestion was made which makes the story of the virgin Princess Kishna one of the saddest in human history. It was suggested by Nawab Ameer Khan, whom Tod characterizes as 'one of the most notorious villains India ever produced,' that the torch of discord should be extinguished in the blood of the innocent cause of the quarrel.

This unhallowed suggestion was made known to the father of the poor girl by the men who had conceived it. The bloodthirsty khan, accompanied by a confederate in wickedness, the pliant, subtle and ambitious Ajit, set out for Oodipur, the capital of Mewar, and revealed the cruel design to the rana. With indignation and rage that prince listened at first to the plot that the life of his child should be the price of reconciliation between the two hostile candidates for her hand, but as pressure was put upon him to the effect that his own peace and safety lay in compliance, he at length yielded his unwilling consent, and said that Kishna should die. It was a weak and cowardly deed, an unholy and unnatural act, and though the rana did it under strong pressure, with ruin staring him in the face from his powerful foes, yet his fame as a prince and a Rajpoot suffered, and will ever suffer, thereby.

Maharajah Dowlut Singh, a relative of the maiden,

was the first called upon to carry the order into execution; but he refused, horror-struck, exclaiming, 'Accursed the tongue that commands it! Dust on my allegiance if thus to be preserved!' Then Maharajah Jowandas, a natural brother, was called, the dire necessity of the deed explained to him, and he was asked to perform it, as it should not be the work of a common hand. He accepted the poniard, but when in youthful loveliness Kishna appeared before him, the dagger fell from his nerveless grasp, and he retired more wretched than the victim.

And now the news of the sacrifice that was to be spread like wildfire through the palace, and the shrieks of the frantic mother were heard as she implored mercy for her child, and called down heaven's vengeance on the would-be murderers. Kishna alone, of all the inmates of the royal house, appeared calm and resigned to her fate.

No one being found willing to take the life of the maiden with a dagger, she was 'excused the steel, and the cup was prepared'—and prepared by female hands. As the messenger presented it in the name of her father, she bowed and drank it, sending up a prayer for his life and prosperity. The raving mother poured imprecations on his head, while the lovely victim, who shed not a tear, thus endeavoured to console her: 'Why afflict yourself, my mother, at this shortening of the sorrows of life? I fear not to die! Am I not your daughter? Why should I fear death? We are marked out for sacrifice from our birth; we scarcely enter the world but to be sent out

again. Let me thank my father that I have lived so long.'

'Thus she conversed till the nauseating draught refused to assimilate with her blood. Again the bitter potion was prepared. She drained it off, and again it was rejected; but, as if to try the extreme of human fortitude, a third was administered, and for the third time nature refused to aid the horrid purpose. It seemed as if the fabled charm which guarded the life of the founder of her race was inherited by the virgin Kishna. But the bloodhounds, the khan and Ajit, were impatient till their victim was at rest; and cruelty, as if gathering strength from defeat, made another and a fatal attempt. A powerful opiate was presented—the *Kasoomba draught*. She received it with a smile, wished the scene over, and drank it. The desires of barbarity were accomplished. She slept!—a sleep from which she never awoke.'

The wretched mother did not long survive the death of her beloved Kishna. In a few days her body was carried to the funeral-pyre. And there was strong indignation and deep grief throughout Rajasthan when it was known that 'the flower' of the race had thus miserably, and yet with such nobility, perished. Tod says that though years have passed since the lovely virgin Princess Kishna was foully done to death, the story is never related in the houses or around the camp-fires of Rajpootana without a faltering tongue and moistened eyes.

XXI.

PRINCESS DAMAYANTI.

A Story from the 'Mahabharata.'

To Bhima, King of Vidarbha, the modern Berar, who is described as 'of terrible prowess, heroic, and well affected towards his subjects, and possessed of every virtue,' there was born 'a jewel of a daughter and three sons possessed of lofty souls.'

The daughter's name was Damayanti, and 'for beauty and brightness, for good name and grace and luck, she became celebrated all over the world.' As was to be expected, she was the pet of the household, and neither her father nor her brothers could deny her anything upon which she had set her heart. When about thirteen years of age there was presented to this lovely girl a hundred handmaids and female slaves, and at the same time she was robed in costly garments, and upon her head, neck, arms and ankles were placed the most costly and beautiful jewellery. 'Thus Bhima's daughter, of faultless features, decked in every ornament, shone in the midst of her handmaids like the

luminous lightning of the clouds. And neither among celestials nor among men was anybody possessed of such beauty ever seen or heard of before. And the beautiful maiden filled with gladness the hearts of all.'

While Damayanti was universally acknowledged to be the most lovely lady of the age, Nala, the son of Virasana, was regarded as the most handsome man. Nala was the king of the Nishadas, and is spoken of as 'truth-telling, strong, well versed in knowledge, possessed of every desirable accomplishment, and the master of a mighty army.' His only failing, which many at that time did not count a failing, but a virtue, was a passion for dice.

The beauty and goodness of Damayanti and the grace and power of Nala were topics of general conversation, and it was not long before the young people heard of each other. And, repeatedly hearing of each other's excellencies and virtues, it followed that they fell in love. And when this mutual attachment was observed by friends of both parties, everybody was pleased, and everything was done to foster and confirm it.

As the days came and went Damayanti lost all peace of mind on account of Nala. 'And heaving frequent sighs, she was filled with anxiety, and became melancholy and pale-faced and lean. And with her heart possessed by the god of love, she soon lost colour, and with her upturned gaze and moods of abstraction looked like one demented. And she lost all inclination for couches and seats and objects of enjoyment. And

she ceased to lie down by day or night, always weeping with exclamations of Oh! and Alas!'

When things had come to this sad state with the lady, her handmaids told the king her father about her illness, though they did not reveal the secret that she was pining for love of Nala. The monarch Bhima, however, had a suspicion of the true state of the case, and, acting upon that suspicion, he declared it was quite time Damayanti thought of marriage, and that he would arrange for a *swayamwara*, or tournament. And the news of this event seemed to do the love-sick maiden good, for she resolved in her heart to choose Nala for her husband out of the suitors who should claim her hand.

The day arrived, and kings and princes from near and far came to Damayanti's *swayamwara*, 'filling the earth with the clatter of their cars, the roar of their elephants, and the neighing of their horses.' 'And that sacred assembly of kings resembled a mountain cavern with tigers. Their arms were robust, resembling iron maces, well shaped and graceful, and looking like five-headed snakes. And graced with beautiful locks and fine noses and eyes and brows, the countenances of the kings shone like stars in the firmament. And when Damayanti entered the hall, the glances of those illustrious princes were riveted upon her, and they longed to obtain her for wife.'

The maiden, however, chose Nala, by bashfully taking hold of the hem of his garment and placing round his neck a floral wreath; and the other suitors departed, disappointed and sad at heart. And after the departure of

the kings, Bhima celebrated with great rejoicings the wedding of Nala and Damayanti.

After the nuptial ceremony, the newly-married pair went to live at Nishada, the capital city of Nala's kingdom, and there they were very happy in each other's society and love, and in the prosperity and joy of their people. Two children were born after a time, and their home was made bright with the patter of little feet and the noise of merry child-laughter.

Not for very long, however, did this peace and blessedness last. It will be remembered that Nala's one weakness was a passion for dice, and, though for some time after his marriage he refrained from play, yet his fingers were constantly itching to throw the dice. And there came a day when a nominal friend, but a real enemy, visited Nishada, called Pushkara, and this man, ever desirous of winning the kingdom from Nala, tempted him to play. The king resisted at first, but Kali, the spirit of evil, entering into him, he at last consented. A day was fixed to begin a match, and for months Nala continued to throw the dice, and always with ill-success. His sorrowful wife, seeing the evil that was in store for them, ventured now and then a sad remonstrance, and the wise counsellors of the king expostulated with him on his folly, but all to no purpose. The infatuated Nala continued to play, and, like other desperate gamblers, the more he lost, the more determined he was to go on and win back his losses.

Damayanti, by the advice of the prime minister, convened a great council of state, and it was then decided to

send the two children away to the court of her father at Vidarbha, for there they would be safe from all harm. Some urged that the queen herself should go, and leave her lord to his fate ; but what true-hearted wife can bear to be severed from her husband, though he prove to be weak and foolish and careless of her happiness? Damayanti, therefore, replied that she would never forsake Nala, but share in his threatened adversity as she had shared in his prosperity.

The king, meanwhile, continued to play, and, staking his jewels, his garments, and even his kingdom, he lost everything. And the wicked Pushkara, having won so much, coveted yet more, and said, with a laugh: 'Nala, my friend, let the play go on.' 'But I have nothing to stake,' replied the king. 'Yes, thou hast; there is thy lovely wife, Damayanti. Stake her.' But, low as Nala had fallen, he was not equal to such an act of baseness, and without a moment's hesitation he answered 'No,' and not trusting himself to say another word, he left the hall and the palace.

And now whither should he go, and what should he do? By his weakness and folly his mighty kingdom had passed from his hands, and he was a beggar in his own capital. Awaking to a knowledge of this truth, the king threw off the princely garments he was wearing, and giving away his ornaments, he prepared to leave the city. 'And attired in a simple piece of cloth, his body uncovered, renouncing all his wealth, amidst the grief of his friends, Nala set out. And Damayanti, similarly clad, followed him as a dog follows its master.'

Coming to the outskirts of the city, the miserable king strove for three days to induce his wife to leave him to his fate. Too desperate to be soothed, Nala felt the gentle presence of Damayanti as an aggravation of his misery, and instead of desiring her companionship, he showed where ran the road conducting to her father's house. The sorrowful lady understood the sign, but gravely shook her head, and said she would not—could not leave him. It was her wish, she told him, to soothe his weariness and comfort him in his sorrow, and if he would have her go to her father's house, then he must go with her. But that was an insupportable idea, for Nala could not bear to think of the anger and wrath of Bhima, his father-in-law, when the whole sad story was revealed to him.

On the third night, in the course of their wanderings, the two outcasts came to a sheltered shed for travellers, and there, wearied with journeying, with hunger and thirst, they laid themselves down to sleep. Damayanti was soon in a profound slumber, for she was much exhausted; but Nala, with mind and heart distraught, could not obtain repose. And reflecting on the loss of his kingdom, the desertion of his friends, and the miseries of life in the woods, he resolved to forsake his wife while she slept, so that she might have no choice but to turn her steps to the home of her childhood. If he were away, he argued, his gentle and faithful wife would go to her father, mother and children, but while he remained at her side there was nothing for both of them but misery.

In the darkness of the night the dethroned monarch arose from his hard bed on the floor of the hut, and, with one long look at his wife—beautiful still, though in rags—he turned to go away. But the deed was not easy to perform. While he thought about it, it seemed comparatively easy, but when it came to action it was quite a different matter.

'And departing, still departing, he returned again, again,
Dragged away by that bad demon—ever by his love drawn back.'

Like a swing, he oscillated between the cabin and the forest, but at length, after lamenting long and piteously, he withdrew himself and departed with a breaking heart.

On the morrow, when Damayanti awoke, she had a feeling that something was amiss. Her sleep had been disturbed by dreams, which had left her thoughtful and sad, and she was vaguely conscious that she was about to enter upon a period of deeper trouble than before. She turned to speak to Nala, but found him not; and then, the nature of the new trouble rushing in upon her mind, she started up and shrieked aloud in fright: 'O husband! O husband! hast thou deserted me? Oh, I am lost and undone—frightened in this desolate place! But no, thou hast not left me; thou art hiding thyself behind those shrubs! I see thee—I see thee, O king! Why dost thou not reply to me? It is cruel of thee, husband, that, seeing me so lamenting, thou dost not approach and comfort me. Come to me, O my husband—come to me!'

But Nala came not, and Damayanti, afflicted with

anguish and burning with grief, began to rush hither and thither. And now the helpless princess sprang up, and now she sank down in stupor; now she shrank in terror, and now she wept and wailed aloud. And weeping bitterly, she wandered into the woods, going aimlessly in search of her husband, for she knew not what to do. And as she was piteously lamenting and shouting as best she could, 'O husband! O husband!' she felt herself suddenly seized by a gigantic serpent, and, giving herself up for lost, she called yet louder on her absent lord to come to her rescue. Nala heard not, for he was far away in the depths of the forest; but a huntsman ranging the woods, hearing the cry for help, hurried swiftly to the spot, and was just in time, by a cut of his sword, to save the lady from death. As the serpent raised its head and prepared to dart its fangs into the flesh of its victim, down came the sharp blade upon its neck, and all danger was past.

After this adventure, Damayanti set off once more in search of her husband, resolved to find him or die in the woods. And now she came upon 'a woody asylum of ascetics, resembling in beauty a celestial grove.' Entering their poor dwelling-places, she found many holy men who had devoted themselves to a life in the wilderness, thinking thus to please the gods. They were 'self-denying and strict in diet, with minds under control, endued with holiness, some living on water, some on air, and some on fallen leaves. They were clad in barks of trees and deer-skins, and were eminently happy, seeking the way to heaven.'

With these holy brethren Damayanti stayed to rest herself; and knowing their wisdom and goodness, she inquired of them concerning her husband and prayed for their blessing. And they answered her, 'O blessed and beauteous one, we see by ascetic power that the future will bring happiness to thee, and that thou shalt soon behold thy Nala. O daughter of Bhima, thou shalt behold the king, thy lord, freed from distress, and freed from sin, and decked with all kinds of gems, and ruling his own city, and chastising his enemies, and striking terror into the heart of his foes, and gladdening the hearts of friends, and crowned with every blessing.' Damayanti listened with joy to these prophesyings, and inquired: 'When shall these things be?' But nothing was revealed to her with regard to the time of returning happiness.

Her stay at the friendly ascetics' huts cheered the good lady, however, and when she set forth once more to seek her lord she went with more hopefulness than of yore, though still in fear and in great trembling. 'And wandering in quest of her lord, Bhima's daughter beheld many trees and streams and delightful mountains, and many rivers of wonderful appearance.' But the beauties of Nature had no charm for Damayanti, for she pined for her husband, and she went hither and thither calling him by name.

Proceeding thus on her way, the princess came quite suddenly upon a body of merchants with horses and elephants, encamped by the banks of a river. 'And as soon as she saw the caravan, the wife of Nala lean and

pale, and with hair covered with dust, drew near and entered into its midst.' And beholding her, and not knowing what to make of this woman of the woods, 'some fled in fear, and some became extremely anxious, and some cried aloud, and some laughed at her, and some despised her.' But some felt pity for her and addressed her, saying: 'O sorrowful one, who art thou, and to whom dost thou belong? and what seekest thou in these woods?' And the lady answered: 'O leader of the caravan, ye merchants, ye youths, ye old men and children, I am the daughter of a king, and the daughter-in-law of a king, and the consort also of a king. My husband has been ruined and banished, and has forsaken me, and I am seeking him if haply I may find him.'

The leader of the caravan, when he knew the story of the unfortunate lady, told her that they were journeying to the capital city of the Chedis, of which Suvahu the Truthful was king. 'Come with us, fair lady,' said one and all; 'it may be at that city thou wilt find thy husband.' And hoping against hope, Damayanti accompanied them. For some days the caravan journeyed without any mishap, but just as they drew near their journey's end, an unfortunate calamity overtook them. The caravan, worn out with toil, resolved to halt for a night beside a large lake fragrant with lotuses in the midst of the forest. 'And it came to pass that at the hour of midnight, when everything was hushed and still, and the tired travellers had fallen asleep, a herd of elephants going towards a mountain stream saw that caravan, as also the numerous elephants belonging to it.

And seeing their domesticated fellows, the wild elephants rushed impetuously at them with the intention of killing them.' Then was there a great noise and confusion, and the merchants, awaking from sleep, fled into the woods for refuge. But some were slain by the tusks, some by the trunks, and some by the legs of the elephants. And many of the camels and horses were killed.

Damayanti alarmed, like the rest, by the noise, rose up in great excitement, and ran in wild horror to a place of refuge. And those of the caravan who had escaped unhurt met together near the hiding-place of the princess to talk over the occurrences of the night. And she heard them saying to one another: 'Of what deed of ours is this the consequence? Surely we have failed to worship the deities that cause calamities, or perhaps we have not paid them chief homage, or perhaps this evil is the result of the birds of evil omen we saw yesterday. Or perhaps our stars are not propitious.' But some answered: 'Not so; all things are right with us; our disaster has arisen from the presence in our caravan of that maniac-like woman whom we picked up on the way. She is certainly a Rakshasa. If we catch her, we should slay her with stones, and dust, and grass, and wood and cuffs.'

Hearing these words of the angry merchants, Damayanti, when they had retired, slipped away unobserved, and fled into the woods in terror and anxiety. And reproaching herself she said: 'Alas! fierce and great is the wrath of God on me! Peace followeth not in my track. Of what misdeed is this the consequence? I do

not remember that I ever did even a little wrong to any-one in thought or word or deed. Of what, then, is this the consequence; it must be on account of the great sins I committed in a former life that calamities have befallen me, such as the loss of my husband's kingdom, his defeat at the hands of his kinsman, this separation from my lord and my son and daughter, this my unprotected state, my presence in this forest, and the disaster which has just occurred.'

Oppressed with these thoughts, Damayanti proceeded on her way, and, lo! towards evening she came to the city the merchants had spoken of, over which King Suvahu reigned. 'And she entered that city clad in half a garment. And the citizens saw her overcome with fear, and lean, and melancholy, her hair dishevelled and soiled with dust, and maniac-like. And beholding her, the boys of the city from curiosity began to follow her. And surrounded by them she arrived before the palace of the king.'

From the terrace the queen-mother saw the poor and sorrowful lady in the crowd, and, being tender-hearted and kind, she sent her nurse to speak to her, and bring her into the palace. Now the tale of woe was spoken into an attentive and compassionate ear, and when she knew all, Suvahu's queen went to consult her husband as to what should be done, and that good man answered: 'Dear wife, accept this lady to our home. Let her be thy companion, as she is of the same age as thee.' And the queen, cheerfully consenting, led Dama-yanti away to her apartments, where a transformation

was made in the apparel of the destitute lady; and being well cared for in that royal household, Damayanti quickly regained her marvellous beauty, though her heart was still sad as she thought of her husband.

After a time King Bhima heard that his daughter was at the court of King Suvahu, whereupon he sent messengers and a retinue to bring her back to her home and children. Arrived there, for a time she regained something of her wonted happiness, but notwithstanding the kindness of her parents and the affection of her children, she soon began to pine again for her absent lord and to devise schemes for discovering his whereabouts and to bring him back to her side.

And where meanwhile was the dethroned king, and how fared it with him? For many days he had wandered about the forest, meeting with strange and thrilling adventures, but, surmounting all difficulties and overcoming all dangers, he had made his way to the city of Ayodhya, the modern Oudh. Showing remarkable skill in training and driving horses, he became charioteer to Rituparna, King of Ayodhya. And the latter, in return for the services rendered him, imparted to Nala a thorough and complete knowledge of the secrets of dice. This incident brings out the important fact that, from a Hindu point of view, Nala was not to be blamed for indulging in gambling, but only to be blamed because he had been defeated in play. It would appear that to play was a virtue, but to be defeated was a vice.

Damayanti making inquiries in all directions with regard to her husband, was led to suspect that the King

of Ayodhya's skilful charioteer was no other than her lord, but how best to draw him away from Ayodhya and bring him to her father's court she could not for some time decide. At length her love and wit devised a clever scheme which was sure to rouse her absent husband to a sense of his rights, and lead him probably to make himself known. And this scheme was nothing less than to cause the news to be sent to Ayodhya, but only to that city, that Damayanti, the daughter of Bhima, would hold another *swayamwara* and choose a second husband, as it seemed probable that her 'heroic Nala' was no more.

When the King of Ayodhya heard this news he was glad, for he had always admired the lovely and faithful Damayanti, and he announced to his charioteer that on the morrow he desired to be driven in grand state to Vidarbha, to be present when the daughter of Bhima chose her second husband, intimating that he had hope himself of being the favoured one. When Nala heard this news he was almost beside himself with grief and rage, and yet he felt that it was his own mad folly that had led to this proposed second marriage. He thought within himself: 'Perhaps Damayanti is doing this blinded by sorrow. Alas! cruel is the deed that the princess intends to do, having been deceived with regard to myself. It is the nature of women to be inconstant. But yet my offence has been great, and it may be she is acting so because she hath no longer any love for me owing to my separation from her.'

Thus reasoned somewhat unkindly the dethroned king

and husband, endeavouring to throw the blame of his own shortcomings on his long-suffering and faithful wife. The morrow came, and 'with a heart torn with anguish,' Nala mounted his seat on the King of Ayodhya's chariot and drove furiously to Vidarbha. The anxious and expectant Damayanti was on the roof of her father's palace, and when she heard the thunder of chariot wheels and the tramp of the restive steeds, she knew in her heart that her surmises with regard to the charioteer were correct, and that she would soon look upon the form of her 'Nala, the prince of men.'

Damayanti's mother was the only person in the secret with regard to the announcement of a *swayamwara*. Her father, Bhima, knew nothing of the stratagem to bring back the faithless husband, so that when the monarch of Ayodhya arrived, King Bhima was puzzled to know the reason why, and the guest and his charioteer were equally puzzled to find no preparations for a marriage festival. All the parties, however, in true Eastern fashion, betrayed no sign, but kept their own counsel, waiting for events to develop and explain themselves.

Damayanti had not taken into her calculations the probability of Nala being so offended with the announcement of the *swayamwara* as to keep his incognito, but so it turned out, and the poor lady had no little difficulty and trouble in bringing about a successful *dénouement*. Her first step, when she saw that Nala would not come to the palace, was to send one of her handmaids to draw him into conversation, and to watch his conduct, and

bring a report, so that she might be sure about his identity, for as yet it was little more than guesswork that the charioteer was really her Nala.

The handmaid Kasini performed her part with expedition, and brought back a marvellous story with regard to the doings of the errant husband. 'Oh, lady,' she said, 'such a person I have never before seen or heard. Whenever he cometh to a low passage he never stoopeth down, but seeing him, the passage itself groweth in height so that he may pass through it easily. And at his approach impassable narrow holes open wide. Empty vessels also become filled with water at his will, and he touches fire and is not burnt. And I have witnessed a greater wonder still: He took up some flowers and began to press them slowly with his hands. And, pressed by his hands, the flowers did not lose their original forms, but, on the contrary, became gayer and more odorous than before.' So spake the simple-minded and credulous maid, eager to please her mistress, and thinking that, the more extraordinary she made out the deeds of Nala to appear, the more gratified Damayanti would be.

But the suffering wife paid little heed to the tales of marvel related by the maid, and urged her to go once more to the charioteer, and this time to take with her the two young princes and to watch narrowly how the stranger treated the children. Damayanti hoped that the heart of Nala, if indeed the charioteer was Nala, would be so moved at the sight of his offspring that he would betray his identity; and so it turned out.

Immediately, as the maid with the children drew near to him, he recognised the little ones, and sprang forward and embraced them and took them up on his knees; and regarding them attentively, his heart was filled with great sorrow and he began to weep aloud. But restraining himself in a little while, he excused himself to the maid, saying: 'Take the children away! They remind me of my own offspring, from whom I have been parted for some time. Take them away! take them away!'

Hurrying back to her mistress, the maid related what had passed, and now Damayanti felt sure that the charioteer was none other than her husband Nala. And being satisfied on this point, she sought and obtained the permission of her mother to bring matters to a point by having a private interview with the charioteer. The order was thereupon given that Nala should enter the apartments of his wife, and the two were soon face to face. But the jealous husband even then would not throw off his disguise and resume his proper character, and it was only after long pleading and working upon his better feelings that Damayanti could convince him that the idea of a second marriage had never for a moment been really entertained, but was a 'subtle wile' to lure him to her. Then the wanderer was subdued, and the flood-gates of his affections being opened, he gathered his wife into his arms, and the two wept and rejoiced together.

For a little time the reunited happy couple dwelt at the court of their father, King Bhima, but eventually

they moved on to their own lost kingdom. 'With a car white in hue, with sixteen elephants, fifty horses, and six hundred infantry,' Nala entered the city of his birth and early triumphs; and driving up to the palace, he approached the usurper Pushkara and challenged him to another game at dice. 'We will play again,' he shouted, 'for I have earned vast wealth. Let Damayanti and all else that I have be my stake, and let the kingdom be thy stake.' Pushkara, nothing loth, agreed to the terms, and the play began, and, lo! 'Nala at a single throw won his wealth and treasure back.'

The king, influenced by Damayanti, freely forgave his enemy, and sent him away with many rich presents. Thus happily ended the misfortunes and sorrows of Nala and his beautiful queen, and through many long years Damayanti lived to thank the gods for an affectionate husband and for dutiful children. And the people of the land rejoiced because the king and queen had received their own again.

XXII.

SAVITRI.

A Story from the 'Mahabharata.'

SAVITRI was the only daughter of Acwapeti, a king among the Mádras. This king was an able and generous man, and was beloved by his people more warmly than is the lot of many sovereigns. But, though virtuous and highly pious, and constantly ministering to the necessities of Brahmins and receiving their blessing, the gods had not favoured him with offspring until Savitri was born in his old age. And this daughter was given in answer to prayers and penances.

For eighteen long years, it is said, King Acwapeti afflicted himself after the manner of Indian sages, before he was granted the desire of his heart. Various are the forms which austerities take, some being more severe than others, but the king did not shrink even from the most painful. Some ascetics will hang themselves up by the feet, head downwards, and remain in that position for a long time; others will take a vow of silence for five or ten or twenty years; others will make long pilgrimages to various holy shrines, 'measuring their

length' on the ground all the way; others will hold up the right hand over the head until it has become stiff and fixed; others will clench the hand till the nails grow through the palm; others will sit between four fires with the blazing sun overhead, or stand up to the neck in water for hours; while others will walk round a temple-yard wearing shoes studded inside with sharp nails. In short, there seems to be no hardship or personal cruelty ascetics will not commit in India when they have set their hearts upon obtaining some great blessing from the gods.

After eighteen years of self-torture there was born, as we have said, to King Acwapeti a daughter, who was named Savitri, after the goddess Savitri, the wife of Brahma. With tender solicitude were the infant years of this child watched over by the thankful father and mother, and they hoped their daughter would grow up to be the stay and comfort of their declining years.

Time passed, and the little one developed into a maiden alike beautiful, wise, and good.

'In those far-off primeval days,
Fair India's daughters were not pent
In closed zenanas. On her way
Savitri at her pleasure went
Whither she chose—and hour by hour,
With young companions of her age,
She roamed the woods for fruit or flower,
Or loitered in some hermitage;
For to the Munis, gray and old,
Her presence was as sunshine glad:
They taught her wonders manifold,
And gave her of the best they had.'*

* Toru Dutt's 'Ancient Ballads and Legends of Hindostan.'

And with a mind well stored with the wisdom of the sages, with a body strengthened and developed by healthy recreation, and with a heart purified by prayer, Savitri was a princess whom the noblest prince in the land might be proud to make his wife. But young men fought shy of her, perchance because she was so ideally beautiful, and so evidently superior to all around her.

When the maiden arrived at a marriageable age, and yet no suitor appeared on the scene, the king became concerned, remembering the saying: 'The father that doth not bestow his daughter cometh by disgrace.' Like a sensible husband, the monarch talked to his queen of the matter, and she set his anxieties at rest by exhorting him to trust the gods, who had given them their daughter, to bring about a suitable match in their own good time:

> 'Savitri may herself elect
> Some day her future lord and guide.'

Months passed, and yet nothing occurred; when lo! one summer morning, as the princess went forth to visit a hermitage at some distance from her home, she met her fate:

> 'As to the hermitage she went,
> Through smiling fields of waving corn,
> She saw some youths on sport intent—
> Sons of the hermits and their peers—
> And one among them tall and lithe,
> Royal in port, on whom the years,
> Consenting, shed a grace so blithe,
> So frank and noble, that the eye
> Was loth to quit that sun-browned face.
> She looked, and looked—then gave a sigh,
> And slackened suddenly her pace.

What was the meaning? Was it love?
Love at first sight, as poets sing,
Is then no fiction? Heaven above
Is witness that the heart its king
Finds often like a lightning-flash.
We play, we jest, we have no care:
When, hark! a step—there comes no crash—
But life, or silent, slow, despair.
Their eyes just met, Savitri passed
Into the friendly Muni's hut;
Her heart-rose opened had at last—
Opened, no flower can ever shut.'

It was with a preoccupied mind that the maiden received her usual instruction that morning from the learned Muni, and at its close she longed and yet hesitated to ask her teacher something about the youth outside, who had so strangely won her regard. The sage, seeing her anxiety, and knowing by his wisdom what troubled her, encouraged her to speak. And when she asked the name and pedigree of the youth, a strange, romantic story was related to her, which, calling out her sympathy, deepened the impression that had already been made upon her heart.

The young man was named Satyavan, and he was the only son of Dyumatsen, now a hermit in the woods. When Satyavan was born, however, his father was a king and ruled over the Salwas:

'But, old and blind, opponents dire
Had gathered round him in a ring,
And snatched the sceptre from his hand.'

And thereupon the dethroned monarch, accompanied by his wife, bearing a child on her breast, had wandered

away from his ungrateful subjects and taken up his abode in the forests. And the child had grown into a boy, and the boy into a man, who was known as the strong and brave and frank Satyavan.

To this story Savitri listened with tears in her eyes, and at its close she sighed, she scarcely knew wherefore, and then blushed, and finally quitted the sage's abode with mingled feelings of sadness and joy. And as she proceeded homewards everything around her seemed more beautiful and gave her greater pleasure than of yore.

'Savitri's first care was to tell
Her mother all her feelings new;
The queen, her own fears to dispel,
To the king's private chamber flew.
"Now, what is it, my gentle queen,
That makes thee hurry in this wise?"
She told him, smiles and tears between,
All she had heard. The king, with sighs,
Sadly replied: "I fear me much!
Whence is his race, and what his creed?
Not knowing aught, can we in such
A matter delicate proceed?"'

There lived in the neighbourhood, though he had not been to see the king for some time, a very wise old man, who was commonly believed to know everything about everybody under heaven, and for this man the king sent, so that light might be thrown upon the character of the youth whom Savitri desired for a husband.

When Narad the Wise arrived, the princess related to him what she had seen, and what she had heard, and what the longings of her heart were at that moment.

Listening gravely, the old man grew graver still; and when Savitri paused, he spoke kindly but firmly as follows: 'Ah no! ah no! my dear, it cannot be! You must not think of it. Choose out another husband.' But the maiden quickly replied:

> 'And why should I? When I have given
> My heart away, though but in thought,
> Can I take back? Forbid it, Heaven!
> It were a deadly sin, I wot.
> And why should I? I know no crime
> In him or his.'

Then the king her father interposed, and proceeded to ask Narad the Wise questions about Prince Satyavan, to find out, if possible, what was objectionable in his character or conduct that stood in the way of any overtures of marriage. The first question was: 'Is the prince energetic, intelligent, forgiving, and courageous?' and the answer came: 'In energy he is like unto the sun, and in wisdom like unto Vrihaspati; and he is brave like unto the lord of the celestials, and forgiving like unto the earth herself.' Again the king questioned, saying: 'Is the prince liberal in gifts and devoted to the Brahmins? Is he magnanimous and handsome, and lovely to behold?' And Narad answered: 'In beauty of person he is like either of the twin Acwins. And with senses under control, he is meek and brave and truthful. And with passions in subjection, he is devoted to his friends and free from malice, and modest and patient. Indeed, briefly speaking, they that know him best say that he is always correct in his conduct, and that honour is firmly seated on his brow.'

'Then where, O Narad, is the bar?
If wealth be gone, and kingdom lost,
His merit still remains a star,
Nor melts his lineage like the frost.
For riches, worldly power, or rank
I care not. I would have my son
Pure, wise, and brave—the Fates I thank:
I see no hindrance, no, not one.'

But though neither the king nor the queen nor Savitri saw any hindrance, yet the wise man did, though he seemed loth to speak of it, and it was only after repeated entreaties that he revealed the sad truth—that, looking ahead, he was able to see that the wise and good prince had only one more year of life to live. At this announcement the king fell back dismayed, and was much troubled in soul, knowing scarcely what to say or do. At length, however, he took his daughter's hand in his, and urged her with a shaking voice to give up all thought of Satyavan for a husband. 'Thou hast given no pledge,' he said; 'no blame can attach to thee. Forget the youth,

'And think upon the dreadful curse
Of widowhood; the vigils, fasts,
And penances; no life is worse
Than hopeless life—the while it lasts.
Day follows day in one long round,
Monotonous and blank and drear;
Less painful were it to be bound
On some bleak rock, for aye to hear—
Without one chance of getting free—
The ocean's melancholy voice!
Mine be the sin, if sin there be,
But thou must make a different choice.'

The gentle Savitri, however, declared that though she was ready to bow to the will of her father if he decided she must not marry Satyavan, yet would she marry no one else, but remain a maid all her life long. Her heart and faith, she said, had been given away and were beyond recall. 'With a life short or long, possessed of blessings or bereft of them, I have for once selected my husband, and twice I shall not select.' And the maiden's constancy won the day.

'She said, and meekly looked to both.
The father, though he patient heard,
To give the sanction still seemed loth,
But Narad muni took the word.
"Bless thee, my child! 'Tis not for us
To question the Almighty will;
Though cloud on cloud loom ominous,
In gentle rain they may distil."
At this the monarch: "Be it so!
I sanction what my friend approves;
All praise to Him, whom praise we owe;
My child shall wed the youth she loves."'

Consent having been given, there was no delay in bringing matters to a conclusion. King Acwapeti, calling together his priests and some of his most trusted counsellors, took his daughter with him and started for the hermitage of the deposed and blind old King Dyumatsen and his son Satyavan. On their arrival they found the aged monarch reclining on a bed of kusa grass spread under a sala tree, with his tall and handsome son in attendance upon him. Mutual obeisances were made and presents exchanged, and then the ques-

tion was asked: 'Wherefore is this visit?' Thus addressed, Acwapeti told the story of his daughter's affection for Satyavan, and their hope that the two might be joined in marriage.

The young man listened to the conversation well pleased, for that day Savitri had lost her heart to him, he had lost his to her. Little had he expected that events would have worked round so favourably and so quickly, and it was with astonishment, with glad surprise, that he listened to all that was said. His father referred to the sad fact that they were in exile. But when that objection was overruled, another was raised. It was asked: 'Would it be kind or right for Savitri to marry one who at present, at any rate, could only give her a hut to live in, in place of a palace to which she had been always accustomed?' All these things, however, had been considered, and Savitri was willing to be wherever her husband was, only now and again she would wish to visit her dear and honoured parents.

Every objection having been overcome, it was decided that very day to celebrate the nuptials. And amidst a concourse of hermit spectators, Satyavan and Savitri, out in the open glade, with the birds singing sweetly around, were made man and wife. King Acwapeti then bestowed suitable robes and ornaments upon his daughter, and went back to his city and to his palace in great joy.

Immediately on the king's departure, Savitri threw aside her royal robes and put off all her ornaments, and 'clad herself in barks, and cloths dyed in red.' And that evening—

'To see the bride, the hermits' wives
And daughters gathered to the huts,
Women of pure and saintly lives!
And there, beneath the betel-nuts,
Tall trees like pillars, they admire
Her beauty, and congratulate
The parents that their hearts' desire
Had thus accorded been by Fate,
And Satyavan, their son, had found,
In exile lone, a fitting mate:
And gossips add: "Good signs abound;
Prosperity shall on her wait."'

Day by day Savitri sought earnestly to do her duty in her new life, and the Hindu chronicler tells us: 'By her services and virtues, by her tenderness and self-denial, and by her agreeable offices unto all, she pleased everybody. She gratified her mother-in-law by waiting upon her; she gratified her father-in-law by controlling her speech; and she pleased her husband by honeyed sayings, by skill in every kind of work, by evenness of temper, and by her affectionate manners.'

Thus outwardly everything went well with the young wife, but, as is touchingly recorded, she was restless within, for 'the words spoken by Narad the Wise about her husband's death were present night and day in the mind of Savitri.' And as the time drew nearer, she had more frequent recourse to prayer to the gods. She could not well communicate her anxiety to those about her, but she could to the gods, and believing in their power and in the efficacy of worship, she was somewhat comforted.

Four days before the awful hour, the poor girl, how-

ever, became much alarmed, and in hope of propitiating the deities and securing length of days to her husband, she resolved to observe what is called the *Triratra* vow, which meant that she would not taste of food of any description for three days and nights. When the other members of the household heard of this her vow, they expostulated with her, not knowing what her special reasons were for taking such a course; but when she gently pleaded to be allowed to have her way, they did not oppose further, though they wondered much at her action.

At length the fateful day arrived, and Savitri prayed without ceasing for her beloved's life. She watched him closely all the morning, but he seemed well and in good spirits; and at noon, as he was still well, a faint hope was born in her heart that her prayers were answered. The afternoon came and went, and still no change for the worse, and the faithful wife was about to rejoice, when, lo! she heard her husband's voice:

"The twilight is most beautiful!
Mother, to gather fruit I go,
And fuel—for the air is cool—
Expect me in an hour or so."

"He goes then," thought Savitri; "thus,
With unseen bands, Fate draws us on
Unto the place appointed us;
We feel no outward force. Anon
We go to marriage or to death
At a determined time and place.
We are her playthings; with her breath
She blows us where she lists in space.

What is my duty? It is clear
My husband I must follow; so
While he collects his forest gear,
Let me permission get to go."'

Permission was granted, though not readily, for the parents, knowing her weak state through fasting, urged her at first to stay at home, but seeing her determination, and thinking there must be more in her conduct than met the eye, they at length said to her: 'Daughter, thou art wise and good; follow thine own secret impulses and wishes.'

Together then the husband and wife started for the woods, he with his axe upon his shoulder and full of joyous life, she with a basket in her hand, and in seeming smiles, although her heart was racked with grief. On the way, Satyavan spoke of the sacred rivers, and the beautiful trees decked with flowers, and whispered to Savitri that his love for her was like the ever-running streams, and that her beauty would compare with the flowers of the forest. And she listened and smiled sweetly yet sadly, for the words of Narad the Wise mingled with the words of her husband, and she thought how near is life to death, and how blindly men go to their doom.

After an hour or two the place was reached to which they were moving, and the fruits were plucked, and the basket filled, and it now remained to gather the fuel they required and return. Satyavan proceeded to fell branches of trees, and then to saw them into smaller pieces to tie in bundles. Throwing himself with hearti-

ness into his work, he waxed warm, then he perspired freely, and the wind blowing through the forest, gave him a chill. And Savitri meanwhile sat watching her lord and wondering in what form death would come, if it came at all.

'Sudden the noise is hushed—a pause—
Satyavan lets the weapon drop.
Too well Savitri knows the cause!
He feels not well, the work must stop.
A pain is in his head—a pain
As if he felt the cobra's fangs.
He tries to look around—in vain!
A mist before his vision hangs;
The trees whirl dizzily around
In a fantastic fashion wild;
His throat and chest seem iron-bound,
He staggers like a sleepy child!

"My head, my head! Savitri dear,
This pain is frightful. Let me lie
Here on the turf."'

But his faithful wife took him to her arms and laid his head upon her breast, and supported him as best she could. And Satyavan whispered—

'"Ah me, this pain! 'Tis getting dark,
I see no more. Can this be death?
What means this, gods? Savitri, mark,
My hands wax cold, and fails my breath."

"It may be but a swoon!" "Ah, no!
Arrows are piercing through my heart.
Farewell, my love! for I must go.
This—this is death."'

So far the story of Savitri has been natural, and has made no call upon our credulity, save in the matter of

the prediction of Satyavan's death, but now we come to mysterious incidents and utterances which call for blind faith. And yet these utterances and incidents teach us noble lessons, and so are worth recording.

The Hindu chronicler wishes to show that Savitri by her devotion to her husband saved his life. And there can be no doubt that she did, only we should say it was done by keeping him warm, and perhaps by giving him a little medicine, which, anticipating sickness, she might have brought with her. Probably Satyavan was simply in a swoon, which sometimes takes place at the commencement of a sharp attack of Indian low fever, and with proper attention there was every prospect of his recovery. Such a tame explanation of the subsequent return to consciousness did not, however, suit the purpose of the chronicler, and in place of it we have a strange, mysterious, but beautiful story. We now resume our narrative:

Savitri, when her husband said: 'This, this is death, thought indeed that all was over with him and holding him fast in her arms, she waited to see what more would happen. 'The next moment she saw a person clad in red attire, his head decked with a diadem. And his body was of large proportions and effulgent as the sun. And he was of a darkish hue, had red eyes, carried a noose in his hand, and was dreadful to behold. And he was standing beside Satyavan, and was gazing steadfastly at him.' Seeing this dread stranger, Savitri placed her husband's head gently on the ground, and, rising, made, with a trembling heart, a reverent obeisance.

'Who art thou,' she said; 'and what is thy mission?' 'I am Yama,' replied the stranger; 'and I am come in person to take away thy husband, for his days are run out.' Saying this, 'Yama by main force pulled out of the body of Satyavan a person of the measure of the thumb, and bound him with the noose he had brought.' Then turning away, Death proceeded in a southerly direction.

'But when the god moved slowly on
To gain his own dominions dim—
Leaving the body there—anon
Savitri meekly followed him,
Hoping against all hope. He turned,
And looked surprised. "Go back, my child!"
Pale, pale the stars above them burned,
More weird the scene had grown and wild.
"It is not for the living—hear!—
To follow where the dead must go.
Thy duty lies before thee clear;
What thou shouldst do the Shasters show."'

But Savitri heeded him not, and answered:

'"Where'er my husband dear is led,
Or journeys of his own free will,
I, too, must go; though darkness spread
Across my path, portending ill.
'Tis thus my duty I have read!
If I am wrong, oh! with me bear;
But do not bid me backward tread
My way forlorn—for I can dare
All things but that. Ah, pity me!
A woman frail, too sorely tried!
And let me, let me follow thee,
O gracious god! whate'er betide."'

And the brave woman followed on o'er hill and dale, through forests and across rivers, with such persistence and patience that Death was touched, and stopped to praise her, and in the course of his speech the truth was revealed that his heart is not as hard as men have supposed it to be. Death is not all adamant, and in proof thereof he bade the weary and long-suffering lady ask from him a boon for herself or her friends, though not for her husband, and it would be granted. And she asked that her husband's sire, who had lost his sight and fair domain, might receive both back again, and Death said: 'It is done. And now—

> '"Go back, my child,
> The hour wears late, the wind feels cold,
> The path becomes more weird and wild;
> Thy feet are torn, there's blood, behold!
> Thou feelest faint from weariness.
> Oh, try to follow me no more;
> Go home, and with thy presence bless
> Those who thine absence there deplore."'

But Savitri becoming used to the companionship of Death, and beginning to understand that Death after all was to be loved rather than feared, replied: 'True,

> '"It is late,
> And the strange landscape awes my sense;
> But I would fain with thee go on,
> And hear thy voice so true and kind;
> The false lights that on objects shone
> Have vanished, and no longer blind,
> Thanks to thy simple presence. Now
> I feel a fresher air around,
> And see the glory of that brow
> With flashing rubies fitly crowned.

"Men call thee Yama—Conqueror—
Because it is against their will
They follow thee ; and they abhor
The truth which thou wouldst aye instil.
If they thy nature knew aright,
O God all other gods above !
And that thou conquerest in the fight
By patience, kindness, mercy, love,
And not by devastating wrath,
They would not shrink in child-like fright
To see thy shadow on their path,
But hail thee as sick souls the light."'

At these words Death was much pleased, and promised another boon to Savitri, only again she was told she must not ask for her husband's life. Thereupon she prayed that King Acwapeti might be granted other children besides herself, so that his family might rule over the land of Madra for many generations. And Death said :

'"Receive thy boon and homeward start,
For, ah ! poor child, thou art not strong."'

But still Savitri followed the soul of her husband, until Death, overcome with her devotion and self-sacrifice, stopped and told her to ask yet one more boon.

'She took the clue, felt Death was love,
For no exception now he named,
And boldly said : "Thou knowest, lord,
The inmost hearts and thoughts of all !
There is no need to utter word,
Upon thy mercy sole I call.
If speech be needful to obtain

Thy grace, oh, hear a wife forlorn—
Let my Satyavan live again,
And children unto us be born,
Wise, brave, and valiant."'

Thereupon Yama, the dispenser of justice, untied his noose, and Savitri, having obtained her lord, went back with joyful heart to the spot where her husband's body lay. And seeing him on the ground, she approached and took hold of him, and placed his head on her lap, as before the coming of Yama. Then Satyavan regained his consciousness.

'Here let us end. For all may guess
The blind old king received his sight,
And ruled again with gentleness
The country that was his by right;
And that Savitri's royal sire
Was blest with many sons—a race
Whom poets praised for martial fire,
And every peaceful gift and grace.
As for Savitri, to this day
Her name is named when couples wed;
And to the bride the parents say,
"Be thou like her, in heart and head."'

THE END.

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